

# **THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN**

Geoffrey Chaucer

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# THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

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## *THE PROLOGE OF GOODE WIMMEN.*

A thousand tymes have I herd men telle,  
That ther is loye in heven, and peyne in helle;  
And I acorde wel that hit is so;  
But natheles, yit wot I wel also,  
That ther nis noon dwelling in this contree,  
That either hath in heven or helle y-be,  
Ne may of hit non other weyes witen,  
But as he hath herd seyde, or founde hit writen;  
For by assay ther may no man hit preve.  
But god forbode but men should leve  
Wel more thing then men han seen with ye!  
Men shal nat wenen every-thing a lye  
But-if him-self hit seeth, or elles dooth;  
For, god wot, thing is never the lasse sooth,  
Thogh every wight ne may hit nat y-see.  
Bernard the monk ne saugh nat al, parde!

Than mote we to bokes that we finde,  
Through which that olde thinges been in minde.  
And to the doctrine of these olde wyse,  
Yeve credence, in every skilful wyse,  
That tellen of these olde appoved stories,  
Of holinesse, or regnes, of victories,  
Of love, of hate, of other sundry thinges,  
Of whiche I may not maken rehersinges.  
And if that olde bokes were a-weye,  
Y-loren were of remembraunce the keye.  
Wel oghte us than honouren and beleve  
These bokes, ther we han non other preve.

And as for me, thogh that I can but lyte,  
On bokes for to rede I me delyte,  
And to hem yeve I feyth and ful credence,  
And in myn herte have hem in reverence  
So hertely, that ther is game noon  
That fro my bokes maketh me to goon,  
But hit be seldom, on the holyday;  
Save, certeynly, whan that the month of May

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

Is comen, and that I here the foules singe,  
And that the floures ginnen for to springe,  
Farwel my book and my devocioun!

Now have I than swich a condicioun,  
That, of alle the floures in the mede,  
Than love I most these floures whyte and rede,  
Swiche as men callen daysies in our toun.  
To hem have I so great affeccoun,  
As I seyde erst, whan comen is the May,  
That in my bed ther daweth me no day  
That I nam up, and walking in the mede  
To seen this flour agein the sonne sprede,  
Whan hit upryseth erly by the morwe;  
That blisful sighte softneth al my sorwe,  
So glad am I whan that I have presence  
Of hit, to doon al maner reverence,  
As she, that is of alle floures flour,  
Fulfilled of al vertu and honour,  
And ever y-lyke fair, and fresh of hewe;  
And I love hit, and ever y-lyke newe,  
And ever shal, til that myn herte dye;  
Al swete I nat, of this I wol nat lye,  
Ther loved no wight hotter in his lyve.

And whan that hit is eve, I renne blyve,  
As sone as ever the sonne ginneth weste,  
To seen this flour, how it wol go to reste,  
For fere of night, so hateth she derknesse!  
Hir chere is pleynly sprad in the brightnesse  
Of the sonne, for ther hit wol unclose.  
Allas! that I ne had English, ryme or prose,  
Suffisant this flour to preyse aright!  
But helpeth, ye that han conning and might,  
Ye lovers, that can make of sentement;  
In this cas oghte ye be diligent  
To forthren me somewhat in my labour,  
Whether ye ben with the leef or with the flour.  
For wel I wot, that ye han her-biforn  
Of making ropen, and lad away the corn;  
And I come after, glening here and there,  
And am ful glad if I may finde an ere  
Of any goodly word that ye han left.  
And thogh it happen me rehercen eft  
That ye han in your fresshe songes sayd,  
For-bereth me, and beth nat evel apayd,  
Sin that ye see I do hit in the honour  
Of love, and eek in service of the flour,  
Whom that I serve as I have wit or might.

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She is the clerness and the verray light,  
That in this derke worlde me wynt and ledeth,  
The herte in—with my sorowful brest yow dredeth,  
And loveth so sore, that ye ben verrayly  
The maistresse of my wit, and nothing I.  
My word, my werk, is knit so in your bonde,  
That, as an harpe obeyeth to the honde  
And maketh hit soun after his fingeringe,  
Right so mowe ye out of myn herte bringe  
Swich vois, right as yow list, to laughte or pleyne.  
Be ye my gyde and lady sovereyne;  
As to myn erthly god, to yow I calle,  
Bothe in this werke and in my sorwes alle.

But wherfor that I spak, to give credence  
To olde stories, and doon hem reverence,  
And that men mosten more thing beleve  
Then men may seen at eye or elles preve?  
That shal I seyn, whan that I see my tyme;  
I may not al at ones speke in ryme.  
My besy gost, that thrusteth alwey newe  
To seen this flour so yong, so fresh of hewe,  
Constreyned me with so gledy desyr,  
That in my herte I fele yit the fyr,  
That made me to ryse er hit wer day —  
And this was now the firste morwe of May —  
With dredful herte and glad devocioun,  
For to ben at the resureccioun  
Of this flour, whan that it shuld uncloze  
Agayn the sonne, that roos as rede as rose,  
That in the brest was of the beste that day,  
That Agenores doghter ladde away.  
And down on knees anon—right I me sette,  
And, as I coude, this fresshe flour I grette;  
Kneling alwey, til hit unclosed was,  
Upon the smale softe swote gras,  
That was with floures swote enbrouded al,  
Of swich swetnesse and swich odour over—al,  
That, for to speke of gomme, or herbe, or tree,  
Comparisoun may noon y—maked be;  
For hit surmounteth pleynly alle odoures,  
And eek of riche beautee alle floures.  
Forgeten had the erthe his pore estat  
Of winter, that him naked made and mat,  
And with his swerd of cold so sore greved;  
Now hath the atempre sonne al that releved  
That naked was, and clad hit new agayn.  
The smale foules, of the seson fayn,  
That from the panter and the net ben scaped,  
Upon the fouler, that hem made a—whaped

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In winter, and destroyed had hir brood,  
In his despyt, hem thoughte hit did hem good  
To singe of him, and in hir song despysse  
The foule cherl that, for his covetyse,  
Had hem betrayed with his sophistrye.  
This was hir song — "the fouler we defye,  
And al his craft!" And somme songen clere  
Layes of love, and Ioye hit was to here,  
In worshipinge and preisinge of hir make.  
And, for the newe blisful somers sake,  
Upon the braunches ful of blosmes softe,  
In hir delyt, they turned hem ful ofte,  
And songen, "blessed be seynt Valentyn!  
For on his day I chees yow to be myn,  
Withouten repenting, myn herte swete!"  
And therwith—al hir bekes gonnen mete,  
Yelding honour and humble obeisaunces  
love, and diden hir other observaunces  
That longeth unto love and to nature;  
Construeth that as yow list, I do no cure.

And tho that hadde doon unkindenesse —  
As dooth the tydif, for new—fangelnesse —  
Besoghte mercy of hir trespassinge,  
And humblely songen hir repentinge,  
And sworn on the blosmes to be trewe,  
So that hir makes wolde upon hem rewe,  
And at the laste maden hir acord.  
Al founde they Daunger for a tyme a lord,  
Yet Pitee, through his stronge gentil might,  
Forgaf, and made Mercy passen Right,  
Through innocence and ruled curtesye.  
But I ne clepe nat innocence folye,  
Ne fals pitee, for "vertu is the mene,"  
As Etik saith, in swich maner I mene.  
And thus thise foules, voide of al malyce,  
Acordeden to love, and laften vyce  
Of hate, and songen alle of oon acord,  
"Welcome, somer, our governour and lord!"

And Zephirus and Flora gentilly  
Yaf to the floures, softe and tenderly,  
Hir swote breth, and made hem for to sprede,  
As god and goddesse of the floury mede;  
In which me thoghte I mighte, day by day,  
Dwellen alwey, the Ioly month of May,  
Withouten sleep, withouten mete or drinke.  
A—doun ful softly I gan to sinke;  
And, leninge on myn elbowe and my syde,

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The longe day I shoop me for to abyde  
For nothing elles, and I shal nat lye,  
But for to loke upon the dayesye,  
That wel by reson men hit calle may  
The "dayesye" or elles the "ye of day",  
The emperice and flour of floures alle.  
I pray to god that faire mot she falle,  
And alle that loven floures, for hir sake!  
But natheles, ne wene nat that I make  
In preysing of the flour agayn the leef,  
No more than of the corn agayn the sheef:  
For, as to me, nis lever noon ne lother;  
I nam with–holden yit with never nother.  
Ne I not who serveth leef, ne who the flour;  
Wel brouken they hir service or labour;  
For this thing is al of anther tonne,  
Of olde story, er swich thing was be–gonne.

Whan that the sonne out of the south gan weste,  
And that this flour gan close and goon to reste  
For derknesse of the night, the which she dredde,  
Hoom to myn hous ful swiftly I me spedde  
To goon to reste, and erly for to ryse,  
To seen this flour to sprede, as I devyse.  
And, in a litel herber that I have,  
That benched was on turves fresshe y–grave,  
I bad men sholde me my couche make;  
For deyntee of the newe someres sake,  
I bad hem strawen floures on my bed.  
Whan I was leyd, and had myn eyen hed,  
I fel on slepe in–with an houre or two;  
Me mette how I lay in the medew tho,  
To seen this flour that I love so drede.  
And from a–fer com walking in the mede  
The god of love, and in his hande a quene;  
And she was clad in real habit grene.  
A fret of gold she hadde next hir heer,  
And upon that a whyt coroun she beer  
With florouns smale, and I shal nat lye;  
For al the world, ryght as a dayesye  
Y–corouned is with whyte leves lyte,  
So were the florouns of hir coroun whyte;  
For of a perle fyne, oriental,  
Hir whyte coroun was y–maked al;  
For which the whyte coroun, above the grene,  
Made hir lyk a daysie for to sene,  
Considered eek hir feet of gold above.

Y–clothed was this mighty god of love

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In silke, enbrouded ful of grene greves,  
In—with a fret of rede rose—leves,  
The fresshest sin the world was first bigonne.  
His gilte heer was corouned with a sonne,  
In—stede of gold, for hevinesse and wighte;  
Therwith me thoughte his face shoon so brighte  
That wel unnethes mighte I him beholde;  
And in his hande me thoughte I saugh him holde  
Two fyry dartes, as the gledes rede;  
And aungellyke his winges suagh I sprede.  
And al be that men seyn that blind is he,  
Al—gate me thoughte that he mighte see;  
For sternly on me he gan biholde,  
So that his loking doth myn herte colde.  
And by the hande he held this noble quene,  
Corouned with whyte, and clothed al in grene,  
So womanly, so benigne, and so meke,  
That in this world, thogh that men wolde seke,  
Half hir beautee shulde men nat finde  
In creature that formed is by kinde.  
And therfor may I seyn, as thinketh me,  
This song, in preysing of this lady fre.

### *BALADE*

Hyd, Absolon, thy gilte tresses clere;  
Ester, ley thou thy meknesse al a—doun;  
Hyd, Ionathas, al thy frendly manere;  
Penalopee, and Marcia Catoun,  
Mak of your wyfhod no comparisoun;  
Hyde ye your beautes, Isoude and Eleyne,  
My lady cometh, that al this may disteyne.

Thy faire body, lat hit nat appere,  
Lavyne; and thou, Lucesse of Rome toun,  
And Polixene, that boghten love so dere,  
And Cleopatre, with al thy passioun,  
Hyde ye your trouthe of love and your renoun;  
And thou, Tisbe, that hast of love swich peyne;  
My lady cometh, that al this may disteyne.

Herro, Dido, Laudomia, alle y—fere,  
And Phyllis, hanging for thy Demophon,  
And Canace, espyed by thy chere,  
Ysiphile, betrayed with Jasoun,  
Maketh of your trouthe neyther boost ne soun;  
Nor Ypermistre or Adriane, ye tweyne;



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My lady cometh, that al this may disteyne.

This balade may ful wel y-songen be,  
As I have seyde erst, by my lady free;  
For certeynly, alle these now nat suffyse  
To apperen with my lady in no wyse.  
For as the sonne wol the fyr disteyne,  
So passeth al my lady sovereyne,  
That is so good, so fair, so debonaire;  
I prey to god that ever falle hir faire!  
For, hadde comfort been of hir presence,  
I had ben deed, withouten any defence,  
For drede of Loves wordes and his chere;  
As, when tyme is, her-after ye shal here.

Behind this god of love, upon the grene,  
I saugh cominge of ladyes nyntene  
In real habit, a ful esy paas;  
And after hem com of women swich a traas,  
That, sin that god Adam had mad of erthe,  
The thridde part of mankynd, or the ferthe,  
Ne wende I nat by possibilitee,  
Had ever in this wyde worlde y-be;  
And trewe of love these women were echoon.

Now whether was that a wonder thing or noon,  
That, right anon as that they gonne espye  
This flour, which that I clepe the dayesye,  
Ful sodeinly they stinten alle at ones,  
And kneled down, as it were for the nones,  
And songen with o vois, "hele and honour  
To trouthe of womanhede, and to this flour  
That berth our alder prys in figuringe!  
Hir whyte coroun berth the witnessinge!"

And with that word, a compas enviroon,  
They setten hem ful softly adoun.  
First sat the god of love, and sith his quene  
With the whyte coroun, clad in grene;  
And sithen al the remenant by and by,  
As they were of estaat, ful curteisly;  
Ne nat a word was spoken in the place  
The mountance of a furlong-wey of space.

I kneling by this flour, in good entente  
Abood, to knowen what this peple mente,

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As stille as any stoon; til at the laste,  
This god of love on me his eyen caste,  
And seyde, "who kneleth ther?" and I answerde  
Unto his asking, whan that I hit herde,  
And seyde, "sir, hit am I"; and com him neer,  
And salued him. Quod he, "what dostow heer  
So nigh myn owne flour, so boldely?  
For it were better worthy, trewely,  
A worm to neghen neer my flour than thou."  
"And why, sir," quod I, "and hit lyke yow?"  
"For thou," quod he, "art ther—to nothing able.  
Hit is my relik, digne and delytable,  
And thou my fo, and al my folk werreyest,  
And of myn olde servaunts thou misseyest,  
And hindrest hem, with thy translacioun,  
And lettest folk from hir devocioun  
To serve me, and holdest hit folye  
To serve Love. Thou mayest hit nat denye;  
For in pleyn text, with—outen nede of glose,  
Thou hast translated the Romaunce of the Rose,  
That is an heresyge ageyns my lawe,  
And makest wyse folk fro me withdrawe.  
And of Criseyde thou hast seyde as thee liste,  
That maketh men to wommen lasse triste,  
That ben as trewe as ever was any steel.  
Of thyn answer avyse thee right weel;  
For, thogh that thou reneyed hast my lay,  
As other wrecches han doon many a day,  
By seynt Venus, that my moder is,  
If that thou live, thou shalt repenten this  
So cruelly, that hit shal wel be sene!"

Tho spak this lady, clothed al in grene,  
And seyde, "god, right of your curtesye,  
Ye moten herknen if he can replye  
Agayns al this that ye han to him meved;  
A god ne sholde nat be thus agreved,  
But of his deitee he shal be stable,  
And therto gracious and merciable.  
And if ye nere a god, that knowen al,  
Than mighte hit be, as I yow tellen shal;  
This man to you may falsly been accused,  
Ther as by right him oghte been excused.  
For in your court is many a losengeour,  
And many a queynte totelere accusour,  
That tabouren in your eres many a soun,  
Right after hir imaginacioun,  
To have your daliance, and for envye;  
These been the causes, and I shall nat lye.  
Envye is lavender of the court alway;

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For she ne parteth, neither night ne day,  
Out of the hous of Cesar; thus seith Dante;  
Who—so that goth, algate she wol nat wante.  
And eek, paraunter, for this man is nyce,  
He mighte doon hit, gessing no malyce,  
But for he useth thinges for to make;  
Him rekketh noght of what matere he take;

Or him was boden maken thilke tweye  
Of som persone, and durste hit nat with—seye;  
Or him repenteth utterly of this.  
He ne hath nat doon so grevously amis  
To translaten that olde clerkes wryten,  
As thogh that he of malice wolde endyten  
Despyt of love, and had him—self hit wroght.  
This shulde a rightwys lord have in his thoght,  
And nat be lyk tiraunts of Lumbardye,  
That han no reward but at tirannye.  
For he that king or lord is naturel,  
Him oghte nat be tiraunt ne cruel,  
As is a fermour, to doon the harm he can.  
He moste thinke hit is his lige man,  
And is his tresour, and his gold in cofre.  
This is the sentence of the philosopre:  
A king to kepe his liges in Iustyce;  
With—outen doute, that is his offyce.  
Al wole he kepe his lordes hir degree,  
As hit is right and skilful that they be  
Enhaunced and honoured, and most dere —  
For they ben half—goddes in this world here —  
Yit mot he doon bothe right, to pore and riche,  
Al be that hir estat be nay y—liche,  
And han of pore folk compassioun,  
For lo, the gentil kynd of the leoun!  
For whan a flye offendeth him or byteth,  
He with his tayl away the flye smyteth  
Al esily; for, of his genterye,  
Him deyneth nat to wreke him on a flye,  
As doth a curre or elles another beste.  
In noble corage oghte been areste,  
And weyen every thing by equitee,  
And ever han reward to his owen degree.  
For, sir, hit is no maystrie for a lord  
To dampne a man with—oute answere of word;  
And, for a lord, that is ful foul to use.  
And if so be he may him nat excuse,  
But asketh mercy with a dredful herte,  
And profreth him, right in his bare sherte,  
To been right at your owne Iugement,  
Than oghte a god, by short avysement,

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Considre his owne honour and his trespas.  
For sith no cause of deeth lyth in his cas,  
Yow oghte been the lighter merciabile;  
Leteth your yre, and beth somewhat trefable!  
The man hath served yow of his conning,  
And forthred wel your lawe in his making.

"Al be hit that he can nat wel endyte,  
Yet hath he maked lewed folk delyte  
To serve you, in preysing of your name.  
He made of the book that hight the Hous of Fame,  
And eek the Deeth of Blaunche the Duchesse,  
And the Parlement of Foules, and I gesse,  
And al the love of Palamon and Arcyte  
Of Thebes, thogh the story is knowen lyte;  
And many an ympne for your halydayes,  
That highten Balades, Roundels, Virelayes;  
And, for to speke of other holynesse,  
He hath in prose translated Boece,  
And mad the Lyf also of seynt Cecyle;  
He made also, goon sithen a greet whyl,  
Origenes upon the Maudeleyne;  
Him oghte now to have the lesse peyne;  
He hath mad many a lay and many a thing.

"Now as ye been a god, and eek a king,  
I, your Alceste, whylom quene of Trace,  
I aske yow this man, right of your grace,  
That ye him never hurte in al his lyve;  
And he shal sweren yow, and that as blyve,  
He shal no more agilten in this wyse;  
But he shal maken, as ye wil devyse,  
Of wommen trewe in lovinge al hir lyve,  
Wher-so ye wil, of maiden or of wyve,  
And forthren yow, as muche as he misseyde  
Or in the Rose or elles in Creseyde."

The god of love answerde hir thus anoon,  
"Madame," quod he, "hit is so long agoon  
That I yow knew so charitable and trewe,  
That never yit, sith that the world was newe,  
To me ne fond I better noon than ye.  
If that I wolde save my degree,  
I may ne wol nat werne your requeste;  
Al lyth in yow, doth with him as yow leste.  
I al foryeve, with-ouen lenger space;  
For who-so yeveth a yift, or doth a grace,  
Do hit by tyme, his thank is wel the more;

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And demeth ye what he shal do therfore.  
Go thanke now my lady heer," quod he.

I roos, and doun I sette me on my knee,  
And seyde thus: "madame, the god above  
Foryelde yow, that ye the god of love  
Han maked me his wrathe to foryive;  
And yeve me grace so long for to live,  
That I may knowe soothly what ye be  
That han me holpe and put in this degree.  
But truly I wende, as in this cas,  
Naught have agilt, ne doon to love trespas.  
Forwhy a trewe man, with-outen drede,  
Hath not to parten with a theves dede;  
Ne a trewe lover oghte me nat blame,  
Thogh that I speke a fals lover som shame.  
They oghte rather with me for to holde,  
For that I of Creseyde wroot or tolde,  
Or of the Rose; what-so myn auctour mente,  
Algate, god wot, hit was myn entente  
To forthren trouthe in love and hit cheryce;  
And to be war fro falsnesse and fro vyce  
By swich ensample; this was my meninge."

And she answerde, "lat be thyn arguinge;  
For Love ne wol nat countrepleted be  
In right ne wrong; and lerne that of me!  
Thou hast thy grace, and hold thee right ther-to.  
Now wol I seyn what penance thou shald do  
For thy trespas, and understond hit here:  
Thou shalt, whyl that thou livest, yeer by yere,  
The moste party of thy tyme spende  
In making of a glorious Legende  
Of Gode Wommen, maidenens and wyves,  
That weren trewe in lovinge al hir lyves;  
And telle of false men that hem bitrayen,  
That al hir lyf ne doon nat but assayen  
How many wommen they may doon a shame;  
For in your world that is now holde a game.  
And thogh thee lyke nat a lover be,  
Spek wel of love; this penance yive I thee.  
And to the god of love I shal so preye,  
That he shal charge his servants, by any weye,  
To forthren thee, and wel thy labour quyte;  
Go now thy wey, this penance is but lyte.  
And whan this book is maad, yive hit the quene  
On my behalfe, at Eltham, or at Shene."

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

The god of love gan smyle, and than he seyde,  
"Wostow," quod he, "wher this be wyf or mayde,  
Or quene, or countesse, or of what degree,  
That hath so litel penance yiven thee,  
That hast deserved sorer for to smerte?  
But pitee renneth sone in gentil herte;  
That maystow seen, she kytheth what she is."  
And I answerde, "nay, sir, so have I blis,  
No more but that I see wel she is good."

"That is a trewe tale, by myn hood,"  
Quod Love, "and that thou knowest wel, pardee,  
If hit be so that thou avyse thee.  
Hastow nat in a book, lyth in thy cheste,  
The grete goodnesse of the quene Alceste,  
That turned was into a dayesye:  
She that for hir husbunde chees to dye,  
And eek to goon to helle, rather than he,  
And Ercules rescowed hir, pardee,  
And broghte hir out of helle agayn to blis?"

"And I answerde ageyn, and seyde, "yis,  
Now knowe I hir! And is this good Alceste,  
The dayesye, and myn owne hertes reste?  
Now fele I wel the goodnesse of this wyf,  
That bothe after hir deeth, and in hir lyf,  
Hir grete bountee doubleth hir renoun!  
Wel hath she quit me myn affeccioun  
That I have to hir flour, the dayesye!  
No wonder is thogh Iove hir stellifye,  
As telleth Agaton, for hir goodnesse!  
Hir whyte coroun berth of hit witesse;  
For also many vertues hadde she,  
As smale floures in hir coroun be.  
In remembraunce of hir and in honour,  
Cibella made the dayesy and the flour  
Y-coroned al with whyt, as men may see;  
And Mars yaf to hir coroun reed, pardee,  
In stede of rubies, set among the whyte."

Therwith this quene wex reed for shame a lyte,  
Whan she was preysed so in hir presence.  
Than seyde Love, "a ful gret negligence  
Was hit to thee, that ilke tyme thou made  
'Hyd, Absolon, thy tresses,' in balade,  
That thou forgete hir in thy song to sette,  
Sin that thou art so gretly in hir dette,  
And wost so wel, that kalender is she

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

To any woman that wol lover be.  
For she taughte al the craft of fyn lovinge,  
And namely of wyfhood the livinge,  
And alle the boundes that she oghte kepe;  
Thy litel wit was thilke tyme a-slepe.  
But now I charge thee, upon thy lyf,  
That in thy Legend thou make of this wyf,  
Whan thou hast other smale y-maad before;  
And fare now wel, I charge thee no more.

"But er I go, thus muche I wol thee telle,  
Ne shal no trewe lover come in helle.  
Thise other ladies sittinge here arowe  
Ben in thy balade, if thou canst hem knowe,  
And in thy bokes alle thou shalt hem finde;  
Have hem now in thy Legend alle in minde,  
I mene of hem that been in thy knowinge.  
For heer ben twenty thousand mo sittinge  
That thou knowest, that been good wommen alle  
And trewe of love, for aught that may befall;  
Make the metres of hem as thee leste.  
I mot gon hoom, the sonne draweth weste,  
To Paradys, with al this companye;  
And serve alwey the fresshe dayesye.

"At Cleopatre I wol that thou beginne;  
And so forth; and my love so shalt thou winne.  
For lat see now what man that lover be,  
Wol doon so strong a peyne for love as she.  
I wot wel that thou mayest nat al hit ryme,  
That swiche lovers diden in hir tyme;  
It were so long to reden and to here;  
Suffyceth me, thou make in this manere,  
That thou reherce of al hir lyf the grete,  
After thise olde auctours listen to trete.  
For who-so shal so many a storie telle,  
Sey shortly, or he shal to longe dwelle."  
And with that word my bokes gan I take,  
And right thus on my Legend gan I make.

### *I. THE LEGEND OF CLEOPATRA -- Incipit Legenda Cleopatrie, Martiris, Egipti Regine.*

After the deeth of Tholomee the king,  
That al Egipte hadde in his governing,  
Regned his quene Cleopataras;  
Til on a tyme befel ther swiche a cas,

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

That out of Rome was sent a senatour,  
For to conqueren regnes and honour  
Unto the toun of Rome, as was usaunce,  
To have the world unto her obeisaunce;  
And, sooth to seye, Antonius was his name.  
So fil hit, as Fortune him oghte a shame  
Whan he was fallen in prosperitee,  
Rebel unto the toun of Rome is he.  
And over al this, the suster of Cesar,  
He lafte hir falsly, er that she was war,  
And wolde algates han another wyf;  
For whiche he took with Rome and Cesar stryf.

Natheles, for-sooth, this ilke senatour  
Was a ful worthy gentil werreyour,  
And of his deeth hit was ful greet damage.  
But love had broght this man in swiche a rage,  
And him so narwe bounden in his las,  
Al for the love of Cleopataras,  
That al the world he sette at no value.  
Him thoughte, nas to him no thing so due  
As Cleopatras for to love and serve;  
Him roghte nat in armes for to sterve  
In the defence of hir, and of hir right.

This noble quene eek lovede so this knight,  
Through his desert, and for his chivalrye;  
As certainly, but-if that bokes lye,  
He was, of persone and of gentillesse,  
And of discrecioun and hardinesse,  
Worthy to any wight that liven may.  
And she was fair as is the rose in May.  
And, for to maken shortly is the beste,  
She wex his wyf, and hadde him as hir leste.

The wedding and the feste to devyse,  
To me, that have y-take swiche empryse  
Of so many a storie for to make,  
Hit were to long, lest that I sholde slake  
Of thing that bereth more effect and charge;  
For men may overlade a ship or barge;  
And forthy to theeffect than wol I skippe,  
And al the remenant, I wol lete hit slippe.

Octovian, that wood was of this dede,  
Shoop him an ost on Antony to lede  
Al-outerly for his destruccioun,



## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

With stoute Romains, cruel as leoun;  
To ship they wente, and thus I let hem saile.

Antonius was war, and wol nat faile  
To meten with thise Romains, if he may;  
Took eek his reed, and bothe, upon a day,  
His wyf and he, and al his ost, forth wente  
To shippe anoon, no lenger they ne stente;  
And in the see hit happed hem to mete —  
Up goth the trompe — and for to shoute and shete,  
And peynen hem to sette on with the sonne.  
With grisly soun out goth the grete gonne,  
And heterly they hurtlen al at ones,  
And fro the top doun cometh the grete stones.  
In goth the grapnel so ful of crokes  
Among the ropes, and the shering-hokes.  
In with the polax presseth he and he;  
Behind the mast beginneth he to flee,  
And out agayn, and dryveth him over-borde;  
He stingeth him upon his speres orde;  
He rent the sail with hokes lyke a sythe;  
He bringeth the cuppe, and biddeth hem be blythe;  
He poureth pesen upon the hacches slider;  
With pottes ful of lym they goon to-gider;  
And thus the longe day in fight they spende  
Til, at the laste, as every thing hath ende,  
Anthony is shent, and put him to the flighte,  
And al his folk to-go, that best go mighte.

Fleeth eek the queen, with al her purpre sail,  
For strokes, which that wente as thikke as hail;  
No wonder was, she mighte hit nat endure.  
And what that Anthony saw that aventure,  
"Allas!" quod he, "the day that I was born!  
My worshiþe in this day thus have I lorn!"  
And for dispeyr out of his witte he sterte,  
And roof him-self anoon through-out the herte  
Er that he ferther wente out of the place.  
His wyf, that coude of Cesar have no grace,  
To Egipte is fled, for drede and for distresse;  
But herkneth, ye that speke of kindenesse.

Ye men, that falsly sweren many an ooth  
That ye wol dye, if that your love be wrooth,  
Heer may ye seen of women whiche a trouthe!  
This woful Cleopatre hath mad swich routhe  
That ther nis tonge noon that may hit telle.  
But on the morwe she wol no lenger dwelle,

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

But made hir subtil werkmen make a shryne  
Of alle the rubies and the stones fyne  
In al Egipte that she coude espye;  
And putte ful the shryne of spycerye,  
And leet the cors embaume; and forth she fette  
This dede cors, and in the shryne hit shette.  
And next the shryne a pit than doth she grave;  
And alle the serpents that she mighte have,  
She putte hem in that grave, and thus she seyde:  
"Now, love, to whom my sorweful herte obeyde  
So ferforthly that, fro that blisful houre  
That I yow swor to been al frely youre,  
I mene yow, Antonius my knight!  
That never waking, in the day or night,  
Ye nere out of myn hertes remembraunce  
For wele or wo, for carole or for daunce;  
And in my-self this covenant made I tho,  
That, right swich as ye felten, wele or wo,  
As ferforth as hit in my power lay,  
Unreprovable unto my wyfhood ay,  
The same wolde I felen, lyf or deeth.  
And thilke covenant, whyl me lasteth breath,  
I wol fulfille, and that shal wel be sene;  
Was never unto hir love a trewer quene."  
And with that word, naked, with ful good herte,  
Among the serpents in the pit she sterte,  
And ther she chees to han hir buryinge.  
Anoon the neddres gonne hir for to stinge,  
And she hir deeth receyveth, with good chere,  
For love of Antony, that was hir so dere: --  
And this is storial sooth, hit is no fable.

Now, er I finde a man thus trewe and stable,  
And wol for love his deeth so freely take,  
I pray god lat our hedes never ake!

Explicit Legenda Cleopatrie, Martiris.

### ***II. THE LEGEND OF THISBE OF BABYLON. Incipit Legenda Tesbe Babilonie, Martiris.***

At Babiloine whylom fil it thus,  
The whiche toun the queen Semiramus  
Leet dichen al about, and walles make  
Ful hye, of harde tyles wel y-bake.  
Ther weren dwellinge in this noble toun  
Two lordes, which that were of greet renoun,  
And woneden so nigh, upon a grene,

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

That ther nas but a stoon-wal hem bitwene,  
As ofte in grete tounes is the wone.  
And sooth to seyn, that o man hadde a sone,  
Of al that londe oon of the lustieste.  
That other hadde a doghter, the faireste,  
That estward in the world was tho dwellinge.  
The name of everich gan to other springe  
By wommen, that were neighebores aboute.  
For in that contree yit, withouten doute,  
Maidens been y-kept, for Ielosye,  
Ful streite, lest they diden som folye.

This yonge man was cleped Piramus,  
And Tisbe hight the maid, Naso seith thus;  
And thus by report was hir name y-shove  
That, as they wexe in age, wex hir love;  
And certein, as by reson of hir age,  
Ther mighte have been bitwix hem mariage,  
But that hir fadres nolde hit nat assente;  
And bothe in love y-lyke sore they brente,  
That noon of alle hir frendes mighte hit lette  
But prively somtyme yit they mette  
By sleighte, and speken som of hir desyr;  
As, wry the glead, and hotter is the fyr;  
Forbede a love, and it is ten so wood.

This wal, which that bitwix hem bothe stood,  
Was cloven a-two, right fro the toppe adoun.  
Of olde tyme of his fundacioun;  
But yit this clifte was so narwe and lyte,  
It as nat sene, dere y-nogh a myte.  
But what is that, that love can nat espye?  
Ye lovers two, if that I shal nat lye,  
Ye founden first this litel narwe clifte;  
And, with a soun as softe as any shrifte,  
They lete hir wordes through the clifte pace,  
And tolden, whyl that they stode in the place,  
Al hir compleynt of love, and al hir wo,  
At every tyme whan they dorste so.

Upon that o syde of the wal stood he,  
And on that other syde stood Tisbe,  
The swote soun of other receyve,  
And thus hir wardeins wolde they deceyve.  
And every day this wal they wolde threte,  
And wisshe to god, that it were doun y-bete.  
Thus wolde they seyn --- "allas! Thou wikked wal,  
Through thyn envye thou us lettest al!

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

Why nilt thou cleve, or fallen al a-two?  
Or, at the leste, but thou woldest so,  
Yit woldestow but ones lete us mete,  
Or ones that we mighte kissen swete,  
Than were we covered of our cares colde.  
But natheles, yit be we to thee holde  
In as muche as thou suffrest for to goon  
Our wordes through thy lyme and eek thy stoon.  
Yit oghte we with thee ben wel apayd."

And whan thise ydel wordes weren sayd,  
The colde wal they wolden kisse of stoon,  
And take hir leve, and forth they wolden goon.  
And this was gladly in the even-tyde  
Or wonder erly, lest men hit espyde;  
And longe tyme they wroghte in this manere  
Til on a day, whan Phebus gan to clere,  
Aurora with the stremes of hir hete  
Had dryed up the dew of herbes were;  
Unto this clifte, as it was wont to be,  
Com Pyramus, and after com Tisbe,  
And plighen trouthe fully in hir fey  
That ilke same night to stele away,  
And to begyle hir wardiens everichoon,  
And forth out of the citee for to goon;  
And, for the felde been so brode and wyde,  
For to mete in o place at o tyde,  
They sette mark hir meting sholde be  
Ther king Ninus was graven, under a tree;  
For olde payens that ydoles heried  
Useden tho in felde to ben beried.  
And faste by this grave was a welle.  
And, shortly of this tale for to telle,  
This covenant was affermed wonder faste;  
And longe hem thoughte that the sonne laste,  
That hit nere goon under the see adoun.

This Tisbe hath so greet affeccoun  
And so greet lyking Piramus to see,  
That, whan she seigh her tyme mighte be,  
At night she stal away ful prively  
With her face y-wimpled subtyny;  
For alle her frendes --- for to save her trouthe ---  
She hath for-sake; allas! and that is routhe  
That ever woman wolde be so trewe  
To trusten man, but she the bet him knewe!  
And to the tree she goth a ful good pas,  
For love made her so hardy in this cas;  
And by the welle adoun she gan her dresse.

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

Allas! than comth a wilde leonesse  
Out of the wode, withouten more areste,  
With bloody mouthe, of strangling of a beste,  
To drinken of the welle, ther as she sat;  
And, whan that Tisbe had espyed that,  
She rist her up, with a ful drery herte,  
And in a cave with dredful foot she sterte,  
For by the mone she seigh hit wel with–alle.  
And, as she ran, her wimpel leet she falle,  
And took noon heed, so sore she was a–whaped.  
And eek so glad of that she was escaped;  
And thus she sit, and darketh wonder stille.  
Whan that this leonesse hath dronke her fille,  
Aboute the welle gan she for to winde,  
And right anoon the wimpel gan she finde,  
And with her bloody mouth hit al to–rente.  
Whan this was doon, no lenger she ne stente,  
But to the wode her wey than hath she nome.

And, at the laste, this Piramus is come,  
But al to longe, allas! at hoom was he.  
The mone shoon, men mighte wel y–see,  
And in his weye, as that he com ful faste,  
His eyen to the grounde adoun he caste,  
And in the sonde, as he beheld adoun,  
He seigh the steppes brode of a leoun,  
And in his herte he sodeinly agroos,  
And pale he wex, therwith his heer aroos,  
And neer he com, and fond the wimpel torn.  
"Allas!" quode he, "the day that I was born!  
This o night wol us lovers bothe slee!  
How sholde I axen mercy of Tisbe  
Whan I am he that have yow slain, allas!  
My bidding hath yow slain, as in this cas.  
Allas! to bidde a woman goon by nighte  
In place ther as peril fallen mighte,  
And I so slow! allas, I ne hadde be  
Here in this place a furlong–wey or ye!  
Now what leoun that be in this foreste,  
My body mote he renden, or what beste  
That wilde is, gnawen mote he now myn herte!"  
And with that worde he to the wimpel sterte,  
And kiste hit ofte, and weep on hit ful sore,  
And seide, "wimpel, allas! ther nis no more  
But thou shalt fele as wel the blood of me  
As thou hast felt the bleding of Tisbe!"  
And with that worde he smoot him to the herte.  
The blood out of the wounde as brode sterte  
As water, whan the conduit broken is.

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

Now Tisbe, which that wiste nat of this,  
But sitting in her drede, she thoghte thus,  
"If hit so falle that my Piramus  
Be comen hider, and may me nat y-finde,  
He may me holden fals and eek unkinde."  
And out she comth, and after him gan espyen  
Bothe with her herte and with her yen,  
And thoghte, "I wol him tellen of my drede  
Bothe of the leonesse and al my dede."  
And at the laste her love than hath she founde  
Beting with his heles on the grounde,  
Al bloody, and therwith-al a-bak she sterte,  
And lyke the wawes quappe gan her herte,  
And pale as box she wex, and in a throwe  
Avysed her, and gan him wel to knowe,  
That hit was Piramus, her herte dere.  
Who coude wryte whiche a deedly chere  
Hath Tisbe now, and how her heer she rente,  
And how she gan her-selve to turmente,  
And how she lyth and swowneth on the grounde,  
And how she weep of teres ful his wounde,  
How medeleth she his blood with her compleynte,  
And with his blood her-selven gan she peynte;  
How clippeth she the dede cors, allas?  
How doth this woful Tisbe in this cas!  
How kisseth she his frosty mouth so cold!  
"Who hath doon this, and who hath been so bold  
To sleen my leef? O spek, my Piramus!  
I am thy Tisbe, that thee calleth thus!"  
And therwith-al she lifteth up his heed.

This woful man, that was nat fully deed,  
Whan that he herde the name of Tisbe cryen,  
On her he caste his hevy deedly yen  
And doun again, and yeldeth up the gost.

Tisbe rist up, withouten noise or bost,  
And seigh her wimpel and his empty shethe,  
And eek his swerd, that him hath doon to dethe;  
Than spak she thus: "my woful hand," quod she,  
"Is strong y-nogh in swiche a werk to me;  
For love shal yive me strengthe and hardinesse  
To make my wounde large y-nogh, I gesse.  
I wol thee folwen deed, and I wol be  
Felawe and cause eek of thy deeth," quod she.  
"And thogh that nothing save the deeth only  
Mighte thee fro me departe trewely,  
Thou shalt no more departe now fro me

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

Than fro the deeth, for I wol go with thee!

"And now, ye wrecched Ielous fadres oure,  
We, that weren whylom children youre,  
We prayen yow, withouten more envye,  
That in o grave y–fere we moten lye,  
Sin love hath brought us to this pitous ende!  
And rightwis god to every lover sende,  
That loveth trewely, more prosperitee  
Than ever hadde Piramus and Tisbe!  
And lat no gentil woman her assure  
To putten her in swiche an aventure.  
But god forbede but a woman can  
Been as trewe and loving as a man!  
And, for my part, I shal anoon it kythe!"  
And, with that worde, his swerd she took as swythe,  
That warm was of her loves blood and hoot,  
And to the herte she her–selven smoot.

And thus ar Tisbe and Piramus ago.  
Of trewe men I finde but fewe mo  
In alle my bokes, save this Piramus,  
And therfor have I spoken of him thus.  
For hit is deyntee to us men to finde  
A man that can in love be trewe and kinde.  
Heer may ye seen, what lover so he be,  
A woman dar and can as wel as he.

Explicit Legenda Tisbe.

### *III. THE LEGEND OF DIDO, QUEEN OF CARTHAGE. Incipit Legenda Didonis Martiris, Cartaginis Regine.*

Glory and honour, Virgil Mantuan,  
Be to thy name! and I shal, as I can,  
Folow thy lantern, as thou gost biforn,  
How Eneas to Dido was forsworn.  
In thyn Eneid and Naso wol I take  
The tenour, and the grete effectes make.

Whan Troye broght was to destuccioun  
By Grekes sleighte, and namely of Sinoun,  
Feyning the hors y–offred to Minerve,  
Through which that many a Troyan moste sterve;  
And Ector had, after his deeth, appered,

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

And fyr so wood, it mighte nat be stered,  
In al the noble tour of Ilioun,  
That of the citee was the cheef dungeoun;  
And al the contree was so lowe y-brought,  
And Priamus the king fordoon and noght;  
And Eneas was charged by Venus  
To fleen away, he took Ascanius,  
That was his sone, in his right hand, and fledde;  
And on his bakke he bar and with him ledde  
His olde fader, cleped Anchises,  
And by the weye his wyf Creusa he lees.  
And mochel sorwe hadde he in his minde  
Er that he coude his felawshippe finde.  
But, at the laste, whan he had hem founde,  
He made him redy in a certein stounde,  
And to the see ful faste he gan him hye,  
And saileth forth with al his companye  
Toward Itaile, as wolde destinee.  
But of his adventures in the see  
Nis nat to purpos for to speke of here,  
For hit acordeth nat to my matere.  
But, as I seide, of him and of Dido  
Shal be my tale, til that I have do.

So longe he sailed in the salte see  
Til in Libye unnethe aryved he,  
With shippes seven and with no more navye;  
And glad was he to londe for to hye,  
So was he with the tempest al to-shake.  
And whan that he the haven had y-take,  
He had a knight, was called Achates;  
And him of al his felawshippe he chees  
To goon with him, the contre for tespye;  
He took with him no more companye.  
But forth they goon, and lafte his shippes ryde,  
His fere and he, with-ouen any gyde.  
So longe he walketh in this wilderness  
Til, at the laste, he mette an hunteresse.  
A bowe in honde and arwes hadde she,  
Her clothes cutted were unto the knee;  
But she was yit the fairest creature  
That ever was y-formed by nature;  
And Eneas and Achates she grette,  
And thus she to hem spak, whan she hem mette.  
"Sawe ye," quod she, "as ye han walked wyde,  
And of my sustren walke yow besyde,  
With any wilde boor or other beste  
That they han hunted to, in this foreste,  
Y-tukked up, with arwes in her cas?"



## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

"Nay, soothly, lady," quod this Eneas;  
"But, by thy beaute, as hit thinketh me,  
Thou mightest never erthely womman be,  
But Phebus suster artow, as I gesse.  
And, if so be that thou be a goddesse,  
Have mercy on our labour and our wo."

"I nam no goddes, soothly," quod she tho;  
"For maidens walken in this contree here,  
With arwes and with bowe, I this manere.  
This is the regne of Libie, ther ye been,  
Of which that Dido lady is and queen" —  
And shortly tolde him al the occasioun  
Why Dido com into that regioun,  
Of which as now me lusteth nat to ryme;  
Hit nedeth nat; hit nere but los of tyme.  
For this is al and som, it was Venus,  
His owne moder, that spak with him thus;  
And to Cartage she bad he sholde him dighte,  
And vanished anoon out o fhis sighte.  
I coude folwe, word for word, Virgyle,  
But it wolde lasten al to longe a while.

This noble queen, that cleped was Dido,  
That whylom was the wyf of Sitheo,  
That fairer was then is the brighte sonne,  
This noble toun of Cartage hath begonned;  
In which she regneth in so greet honour,  
That she was holde of alle quenes flour,  
Of gentillesse, of freedom, of beautee;  
That wel was him that mighte her ones see;  
Of kinges and of lordes so desyred,  
That al the world her beaute hadde y-fyred;  
She stood so wel in every wightes grace.

Whan Eneas was come un-to that place,  
Unto the maister-temple of al the toun  
Ther Dido was in her devocioun,  
Ful prively his wey than hath he nome.  
Whan he was in the large temple come,  
I can nat seyn if that hit be possible,  
But Venus hadde him maked invisible —  
Thus seith the book, with-ouen any lees.  
And whan this Eneas and Achates  
Hadden in this temple been over-al,  
Than founde they, depeynted on a wal,  
How Troye and al the lond destroyed was.

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

"Allas! that I was born," quod Eneas,  
"Through—out the world our shame is kid so wyde,  
Now it is peynted upon every side!  
We, that weren in prosperitee,  
Be now disslaudred, and in swich degre,  
No lenger for to liven I ne kepe!"  
And, with that worde, he brast out for to wepe  
So tenderly, that routhe hit was to sene.  
This fresshe lady, of the citee quene,  
Stood in the temple, in her estat royal,  
So richely, and eek so fair with—al,  
So yong, so lusty, with her eyen glade,  
That, if that god, that heven and erthe made,  
Wolde han a love, for beaute and goodnesse,  
And womanhod, and trouthe, and seemlinesse,  
Whom sholde he loven but this lady swete?  
There nis no womman to him half so mete.

Fortune, that hath the world in governaunce,  
Hath sodeinly broght in so newe a chaunce,  
That never was ther yit so fremd a cas.  
For al the companye of Eneas,  
Which that he wende han loren in the see,  
Aryved is, nat fer fro that citee;  
For which, the grettest of his lordes some  
By aventure ben to the citee come,  
Unto that same temple, for to seke  
The quene, and of her socour her beseke;  
Swich renoun was ther spronge of her goodnesse.  
And, whan they hadden told al hir distresse,  
And al hir tempest and hir harde cas,  
Unto the quene appered Eneas,  
And openly beknew that hit was he.  
Who hadde Ioye than but his meynee,  
That hadden founde hir lord, hir governour?

The quene saw they dide him swich honour,  
And had herd ofte of Eneas, er tho,  
And in her herte she hadde routhe and wo  
That ever swich a noble man as he  
Shal been disherited in swich degree;  
And saw the man, that he was lyk a knight,  
And suffisaunt of persone and of might,  
And lyk to been a veray gentil man;  
And wel his wordes he besette can,  
And had a noble visage for the nones,  
And formed wel of braunes and of bones.  
For, after Venus, hadde he swich fairnesse,  
That no man might be half so fair, I gesse.

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

And wel a lord he seemed for to be.  
And, for he was a straunger, somewhat she  
Lyked him the bet, as, god do bote,  
To som folk ofte newe thing is swote.  
Anoon her herte hath pitee of his wo,  
And, with that pitee, love com in also;  
And thus, for pitee and for gentillesse,  
Refressed moste he been of his distresse.  
She seide, certes, that she sory was  
That he hath had swich peril and swich cas;  
And, in her frendly speche, in this manere  
She to him spak, and seide as ye may here.

"Be ye nat Venus sone and Anchises?  
In good feith, al the worship and encrees  
That I may goodly doon yow, ye shul have.  
Your shippes and your meynee shal I save;"  
And many a gentil word she spak him to;  
And comaunded her messageres go  
The same day, with-outen any faile,  
His shippes for to seke, and hem vitaile.  
She many a beste to the shippes sente,  
And with the wyn she gan hem to presente;  
And to her royal paleys she her spedde,  
And Eneas alwey with her she ledde.  
What nedeth yow the feste to descryve?  
He never beter at ese was his lyve.  
Ful was the feste of deyntees and richesse,  
Of instruments, of song, and of gladnesse,  
And many an amorous loking and devys.

This Eneas is come to Paradys  
Out of the swolow of helle, and thus in Ioye  
Remembreth him of his estat in Troye.  
To dauncing-chambres ful of parements,  
Of riche beddes, and of ornaments,  
This Eneas is lad, after the mete.  
And with the quene whan that he had sete,  
And spyces parted, and the wyn agoon,  
Unto his chambres was he lad anoon  
To take his ese and for to have his reste,  
With al his folk, to doon what so hem leste.

Ther nas coursere wel y-brydled noon,  
Ne stede, for the Iusting wel to goon,  
Ne large palfrey, esy for the nones,  
Ne luwel, fretted ful of riche stones,  
Ne sakkis ful of gold, of large wighte,

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

Ne ruby noon, that shynede by nighte,  
Ne gentil hautein faucon heronere,  
Ne hound, for hert or wilde boor or dere,  
Ne coupe of gold, with florins newe y-bete,  
That in the lond of Libie may be gete,  
That Dido ne hath hit Eneas y-sent;  
And al is payed, what that he hath spent.  
Thus can this [noble] quene her gestes calle,  
As she that can in freedom passen alle.

Eneas sothly eek, with-outen lees,  
Hath sent un-to his shippe, by Achates,  
After his sone, and after riche thinges,  
Both ceptre, clothes, broches, and eek ringes,  
Som for to were, and som for to presente  
To her, that all thise noble thinges him sente;  
And bad his sone, how that he sholde make  
The presenting, and to the quene hit take.

Repaired is this Achates again,  
And Eneas ful blisful is and fain  
To seen his yonge sone Ascanius.  
But natheles, our autour telleth us,  
That Cupido, that is the god of love,  
At preyere of his moder, hye above,  
Hadde the lyknes of the child y-take,  
This noble quene enamoured to make  
On Eneas; but, as of that scripture,  
Be as be may, I make of hit no cure.  
But sooth is this, the quene hath mad swich chere  
Un-to this child, that wonder is to here;  
And of the present that his fader sente  
She thanked him ful ofte, in good entente.

Thus is this quene in plesaunce and in Ioye,  
With al this newe lusty folk of Troye.  
And of the dedes hath she more enquired  
Of Eneas, and al the story lered  
Of Troye; and al the longe day they tweye  
Entendeden to speken and to pleye;  
Of which ther gan to bredden swich a fyr,  
That sely Dido hath now swich desyr  
With Eneas, her newe gest, to dele,  
That she hath lost her hewe, and eek her hele.  
Now to theeffect, now to the fruit of al,  
Why I have told this story, and tellen shal.

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

Thus I beginne; hit fil, upon a night,  
When that the mone up-reysed had her light,  
This noble quene un-to her reste wente;  
She syketh sore, and gan her-self turmente.  
She waketh, walweth, maketh many a brayd,  
As doon thise loveres, as I have herd sayd.  
And at the laste, unto her suster Anne  
She made her moon, and right thus spak she thanne.

"Now, dere suster myn, what may hit be  
That me agasteth in my dreame?" quod she.  
"This ilke Troyan is so in my thoght,  
For that me thinketh he is so wel y-wroght,  
And eek so lykly for to be a man,  
And therwithal so mikel good he can,  
That al my love and lyf lyth in his cure.  
Have ye not herd him telle his aventure?  
Now certes, Anne, if that ye rede hit me,  
I wolde fain to him y-wedded be;  
This is theeffect; what sholde I more seye?  
In him lyth al, to do me live or deye."

Her suster Anne, as she that coude her good,  
Seide as her thoughte, and somdel hit with-stood.  
But her-of was so long a sermoning,  
Hit were to long to make rehersing;  
But fynally, hit may not been with-stonde;  
Love wol love -- for no wight wol hit wonde.

The dawning up-rist out of the see;  
This amorous quene chargeth her meynee  
The nettes dresse, and speres brode and kene;  
An hunting wol this lusty fresshe quene;  
So priketh her this newe Ioly wo.  
To hors is al her lusty folk y-go;  
Un-to the court the houndes been y-brought,  
And up-on coursers, swift as any thoght,  
Her yonge knightes hoven al aboute,  
And of her wommen eek an huge route.  
Up-on a thikke palfrey, paper-whyte,  
With sadel rede, enbrouded with delyt,  
Of gold the barres up-enbossed hye,  
Sit Dido, al in gold and perre wrye;  
And she is fair, as is the brighte morwe,  
That heleth seke folk of nightes sorwe.

Upon a courser, startling as the fyr,

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

Men mighte turne him with a litel wyr,  
Sit Eneas, lyk Phebus to devyse;  
So was he fresshe arayed in his wyse.  
The fomy brydel with the bit of gold  
Governeth he, right as him–self hath wold.  
And forth this noble guene thus lat I ryde  
An hunting, with this Troyan by her syde.

The herd of hertes founden is anoon,  
With "hey! go bet! prik thou! lat goon, lat goon!  
Why nil the leoun comen of the bere,  
That I mighte ones mete him with this spere?"  
Thus seyn this yonge folk, and up they kille  
These hertes wilde, and han hem at hir wille.

Among al this to–romblen gan the heven,  
The thunder roret with a grisly steven;  
Doun com the rain, with hail and sleet so faste,  
With hevenes fyr, that hit so sore agaste  
This noble quene, and also her meynee,  
That ech of hem was glad a–wey to flee.  
And shortly, for the tempest her to save,  
She fledde her–self into a litel cave,  
And with her wente this Eneas al–so;  
I noot, with hem if ther wente any mo;  
The autour maketh of hit no menciouun.  
And heer began the depe affecciouun  
Betwix hem two; this was the firste morwe  
Of her gladnesse, and ginning of her sorwe.  
For ther hath Eneas y–kneled so,  
And told her al his herte, and al his wo,  
And sworn so depe, to her to be trewe,  
For wele or wo, and chaunge for no newe,  
And as a fals lover so wel can pleyne,  
That sely Dido rewed on his peyne,  
And took him for husband, [to been] his wyf  
For ever–mo, whyl that hem laste lyf,  
And after this, whan that the tempest stente,  
With mirth out as they comen, hoom they wente.

The wikked fame up roos, and that anon,  
How Eneas hath with the queen y–gon  
In–to the cave; and demed as hem liste;  
And whan the king, that Yarbas hight, hit wiste,  
As he that had her loved ever his lyf,  
And wowed her, to have her to his wyf,  
Swich sorwe as he hath, maked, and swich chere,  
Hit is a routhe and pitee for to here.

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

But, as in love, al-day hit happeth so,  
That oon shal laughen at anothers wo;  
Now laugheth Eneas, and is in Ioye  
And more richesse than ever he was in Troye.

O sely womman, ful of innocence,  
Ful of pitee, of trouthe, and conscience,  
What maked yow to men to trusten so?  
Have ye swich routhe upon hir feined wo,  
And han swich olde ensamples yow befor?  
See ye nat alle, how they been for-sworn?  
Wher see ye oon, that he ne hath laft his leef,  
Or been unkinde, or doon her som mischeef,  
Or pilled her, or bosted of his dede?  
Ye may as wel hit seen, as ye may rede;  
Tak heed now of this grete gentil-man,  
This Troyan, that so wel her plesen can,  
That feineth him so trewe and obeising,  
So gentil and so privy of his doing,  
And can so wel doon alle his obeisaunces,  
And waiten her at festes and at daunces,  
And whan she goth to temple and hoom ageyn,  
And fasten til he hath his lady seyn,  
And bere in his devyses, for her sake,  
Noot I nat what; and songes wolde he make,  
Iusten, and doon of armes many thinges,  
Sende her lettres, tokens, broches, ringes --  
Now herkneth, how he shal his lady serve!  
Ther-as he was in peril for to sterve  
For hunger, and for mischeef in the see,  
And desolat, and fled from his contree,  
And al his folk with tempest al to-driven,  
She hath her body and eek her reame yiven  
In-to his hond, ther-as she mighte have been  
Of other lond than of Cartage a queen,  
And lived in Ioye y-nogh; what wolde ye more?

This Eneas, that hath so depe y-swore,  
Is wery of his craft with-in a throwe;  
The hote earnest is al over-blowe.  
And prively he doth his shippes dighte,  
And shapeth him to stele a-wey by nighte.

This Dido hath suspecioun of this,  
And thoughte wel, that hit was al a-mis;  
For in his bedde he lyth a-night and syketh;  
She asketh him anon, what him mislyketh --  
"My dere herte, which that I love most?"

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

"Certes," quod he, "this night my fadres gost  
Hath in my sleep so sore me tormented,  
And eek Mercurie his message hath presented,  
That nedes to the conquest of Itaile  
My destinee is sone for to saile;  
For which, me thinketh, brosten is myn herte!"  
Ther—with his false teres out they sterte;  
And taketh her with—in his armes two.

"Is that in earnest," quod she; "wil ye so?  
Have ye nat sworn to wyve me to take,  
Alas! what womman wil ye of me make?  
I am a gentil—woman and a queen,  
Ye wil nat fro your wyf thus foule fleeen?  
That I was born! allas! what shal I do?"

To telle in short, this noble queen Dido,  
She seketh halwes, and doth sacrifise;  
She kneleth, cryeth, that routhe is to devyse;  
Coniureth him, and profreth him to be  
His thral, his servant in the leste gree;  
She falleth him to fote, and swowneth there  
Dischevele, with her brighte gilte here,  
And seith, "have mercy! let me with yow ryde!  
These lordes, which that wonen me besyde  
Wil me destroyen only for your sake.  
And, so ye wil me now to wyve take,  
As ye han sworn, than wol I give yow leve  
To sleen me with your swerd now sone at eve!  
For than yit shal I dyen as your wyf.  
I am with childe, and give my child his lyf.  
Mercy, lord! have pite in your thoght!"  
But al this thing availeth her right noght;  
For on a night, slepinge, he let her lye,  
And stal a—wey un—to his companye,  
And, as a traitour, forth he gan to saile  
Toward the large contree of Itaile.  
Thus hath he laft Dido in wo and pyne;  
And wedded ther a lady hight Lavyne.

A cloth he lafte, and eek his swerd standing,  
Whan he fro Dido stal in her sleping,  
Right at her beddes heed, so gan he hye  
Whan that he stal a—wey to his navye;  
Which cloth, whan sely Dido gan awake,  
She hath hit kist ful ofte for his sake;



## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

And seide, "O cloth, whyl Iupiter hit leste,  
Tak now my soule, unbind me of this unreste!  
I have fulfild of fortune al the cours."  
And thus, allas! with-ouen his socours,  
Twenty tyme y-swowned hath she thanne.  
And, whan that she un-to her suster Anne  
Compleyned had, of which I may nat wryte ---  
So greet a routhe I have hit for tendyte --  
And bad her norice and her suster goon  
To fecchen fyr and other thing anoon,  
And seide, that she wolde sacrificye.  
And, whan she mighte her tyme wel espye,  
Up-on the fyr of sacrificys she sterte,  
And with his swerd she roof her to the herte.

But, as myn autour seith, right thus she seyde;  
Or she was hurt, before that she deyde,  
She wroot a lettre anoon, that thus began: --  
"Right so," quod she, "as that the whyte swan  
Ayeins his deeth beginneth for to singe,  
Right so to yow make I my compleyninge.  
Nat that I trowe to geten yow again,  
For wel I woot that it is al in vain,  
Sin that the goddes been contraire to me.  
But sin my name is lost through yow," quod she,  
"I may wel lese a word on yow, or letter,  
Al-be-it that I shal be never the better;  
For thilke wind that blew your ship a-vey,  
The same wind hath blowe a-vey your fey," --

But who wol al this letter have in minde,  
Rede Ovide, and in him he shal hit finde.

Explicit Legenda Didonis martiris, Cartaginis regine.

### ***IV. THE LEGEND OF HYSIPYLE AND MEDEA. Incipit Legenda Ysiphile et Medee, Martirum.***

#### PART I. THE LEGEND OF HYSIPYLE.

Thou rote of false lovers, duk Iasoun!  
Thou sly devourer and confusioun  
Of gentil-wommen, tender creatures,  
Thou madest thy reclaiming and thy lures  
To ladies of thy statly apparaunce,  
And of thy wordes, farced with plesaunce,

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

And of thy feyned trouthe and thy manere,  
With thyn obeissaunce and thy humble chere,  
And with thy counterfeted peyne and wo.  
Ther other falsen oon, thou falsest two!  
O! ofte swore thou that thou woldest dye  
For love, whan thou ne feltest maladye  
Save foul delyt, which that thou callest love!  
If that I live, thy name shal be shove  
In English, that thy sleighte shal be knowe!  
Have at thee, Iasoun! now thyn horn is blowe!  
But certes, hit is bothe routhe and wo  
That love with false loveres werketh so;  
For they shul have wel better love and chere  
That he that hath aboght his love ful dere,  
Or had in armes many a bloody box.  
For ever as tendre a capoun et the fox,  
Thogh he be fals and hath the foul betrayed,  
As shal the good-man that ther-for hath payed.  
Al have he to the capoun skille and right,  
The false fox wol have his part at night.  
On Iasoun this ensample is wel y-sene  
By Isiphile and Medea the quene.

In Tessalye, as Guido telleth us,  
Ther was a king that highte Pelleus,  
That had a brother, which that highte Eson;  
And, whan for age he mighte unnethes gon,  
He yaf to Pelleus the governing  
Of al his regne, and made him lord and king.  
Of which Eson this Iasoun geten was,  
That, in his tyme, in al that lond, ther nas  
Nat swich a famous knight of gentillesse,  
Of freedom, and of strengthe and lustinesse.  
After his fader deeth, he bar him so  
That ther was noon that liste been his fo,  
Bud dide him al honour and companye;  
Of which this Pelleus hath greet envye,  
Imagining that Iasoun mighte be  
Enhaunsed so, and put in swich degree  
With love of lordes of his regioun,  
That from his regne he may be put adoun.  
And in his wit, a-night, compassed he  
How Iasoun mighte best destroyed be  
Withoute slaunder of his compasment.  
And at the laste he took avisement  
To senden him in-to som fer contree  
Ther as this Iasoun may destroyed be.  
This was his wit; al made he to Iasoun  
Gret chere of love and of affeccoun,  
For drede lest his lordes hti espyde.

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

So fil hit so, as fame renneth wyde,  
Ther was swich tyding over-al and swich los,  
That in an yle that called was Colcos,  
Beyonde Troye, estward in the see,  
That ther-in was a ram, that men mighte see,  
That had a flees of gold, that shoon so brighte,  
That no-wher was ther swich an-other sighte;  
But hit was kept alway with a dragoun,  
And many othere merveils, up and down,  
And with two boles, maked el of bras,  
That spitten fyr, and moche thing ther was.  
But this wsa eek the tale, nathelees,  
That who-so wolde winne thilke flees,  
He moste bothe, or he hit winne mighte,  
With the boles and the dragoun fighte;  
And king Oetes lord was of that yle.

This Pelleus bethoghte upon this wyle;  
That he his newew Iasoun wolde enhorte  
To sailen to that lond, him to disporte,  
And seide, "newew, if hit mighte be  
That swich a worship mighte fallen thee,  
That thou this famous tresor mightest winne,  
And bringen hit my regioun with-inne,  
Hit were to me gret plesaunce and honour;  
Than were I holde to quyte thy labour.  
And al the cost I wol my-selven make;  
And chees what folk that thou wilt with thee take;  
Lat see now, darstow taken this viage?"  
Iasoun was yong, and lusty of corage,  
And under-took to doon this ilke emprise.

Anoon Argus his shippes gan devyse;  
With Iasoun wente the stronge Ercules,  
And many an-other that he with him chees.  
But who-so axeth who is with him gon,  
Lat him go reden Argonauticon,  
For he wol telle a tale long y-now.  
Philoctetes anoon the sail up-drow,  
What that the wind was good, and gan him hye  
Out of his contree called Tessalye.  
So long he sailed in the salte see  
Til in the yle Lemnoun aryved he --  
Al be this nat rehersed of Guido,  
Yet seith Ovyde in his Epistles so --  
And of this yle lady was and quene  
The faire yonge Isiphilee, the shene,  
That whylom Thoas daughter was, the king.

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

Isipilee was goon in her playing;  
And, roming on the clyves by the see,  
Under a banke anoon espyed she  
Wher that the ship of Iasoun gan aryve.  
Of her goodnesse adoun she sendeth blyve  
To witen yif that any straunge wight  
With tempest thider were y-blowe a-night,  
To doon him socour; as was her usaunce  
To forthren every wight, and doon plesaunce  
Of veray bountee and of curtesye.

This messagere adoun him gan to hye,  
And fond Iasoun, and Ercules also,  
That in a cogge to londe were y-go  
Hem to refresshen and to take the eyr.  
The morwening atempre was and fair;  
And in his wey the messagere hem mette.  
Ful cunningly thise lordes two he grette,  
And dide his message, axing hem anoon  
Yif they were broken, or oght wo begoon,  
Or hadde nede of lodesmen or vitaile;  
For of socour they shulde no-thing faile,  
For hit was utterly the quenes wille.

Iasoun answerde, mekely and stille,  
"My lady," quod he, "thanke I hertely  
Of hir goodnesse; us nedeth, trewely,  
No-thing as now, but that we very be,  
And come for to pleye, out of the see,  
Til that the wind be better in our weye."

This lady rometh by the clif to pleye,  
With her meynee, endelong the stronde,  
And fynt this Iasoun and this other stonde,  
In spekinge of this thing, as I yow tolde.

This Ercules and Iasoun gan beholde  
How that the quene hit was, and faire her grette  
Anon-right as they with this lady mette;  
And she took heed, and knew, by hir manere,  
By hir aray, by wordes and by chere,  
That hit were gentil-men, of greet degree.  
And to the castel with her ledeth she  
Thise straunge folk, and doth hem greet honour,  
And axeth him of travail and labour  
That they han suffred in the salte see;

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

So that, within a day, or two, or three,  
She knew, by folk that in his shippes be,  
That hit was Iasoun, ful of renomee,  
And Ercules, that had the grete los,  
That soghten the aventures of Colcos;  
And dide hem honour more then before,  
And with hem deled ever lenger the more,  
For they ben worthy folk, with--outen lees.  
And namely, most she spak with Ercules;  
To him her herte bar, he sholde be  
Sad, wys, and trewe, of wordes avisee,  
With--outen any other affeccioun  
Of love, or evil imaginacioun.

This Ercules hath so this Iasoun preysed,  
That to the sonne he hath him up areysed,  
That han so trewe a man ther nas of love  
Under the cope of heven that is above;  
And he was wys, hardy, secree, and riche. --  
Of thise three pointes ther nas noon him liche;  
Of freedom passed he, and lustihede,  
Alle tho that liven or ben dede;  
Ther--to so greet a gentil--man was he,  
And of Tessalie lykly king to be.  
Ther nas no lak, but that he was agast  
To love, and for to speke shamefast.  
He hadde lever him--self to mordre, and dye  
Than that men shulde a lover him espye: --  
"As wolde almighty god that I had yive  
My blood and flesh, so that I mighte live,  
With the nones that he hadde o--wher a wyf  
For his estat; for swich a lusty lyf  
She sholde lede with this lusty knight!"

And al this was compassed on the night  
Betwixe him Iasoun and this Ercules.  
Of thise two heer was mad a shrewed lees  
To come to hous upon an innocent;  
For to be--dote this queen was hir assent.  
And Iasoun is as coy as is a maide,  
He loketh pitously, but noght he saide,  
But frely yaf he to her conseileres  
Yiftes grete, and to her officeres.  
As wolde god I leiser hadde, and tyme,  
By proces al his wowing for to ryme.  
But in this hous if any fals lover be,  
Right as him--self now doth, right so dide he,  
With feyning and with every sotil dede.  
Ye gete no more of me, but ye wil rede

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

Thoriginal, that telleth al the cas.

The somme is this, that Iasoun wedded was  
Unto this quene, and took of her substaunce  
What—so him liste, unto his purveyaunce;  
And upon her begat he children two,  
And drow his sail, and saw her never—mo.

A lettre sente she to him certein,  
Which were to long to wryten and to sein,  
And him repreveth of his grete untrouthe,  
And preyeth him on her to have som routhe.  
And of his children two, she seide him this,  
That they be lyke, of alle thing, y—wis,  
To Iasoun, save they coude nat begyle;  
And preyed god, or hit were longe whyle,  
That she, that had his herte y—raft her fro,  
Moste finden him to her untrewre al—so,  
And that she moste bothe her children spille,  
And alle tho that suffreth him his wille.  
And trew to Iasoun was she al her lyf,  
And ever kepte her chast, as for his wyf;  
Ne never had she Ioye at her herte,  
But dyed, for his love, of sorwes smerte.

### PART II. THE LEGEND OF MEDEA.

To Colcos comen is this duk Iasoun,  
That is of love devourer and dragoun.  
As matere appetyteth forme al—wey,  
And from forme in—to forme hit passen may,  
Or as a welle that were botomlees,  
Right so can fals Iasoun have no pees.  
For, to desyren, through his appetyt,  
To doon with gentil wommen his delyt,  
This is his lust and his felicitee.

Iasoun is romed forth to the citee,  
That whylom cleped was Iaconitos,  
That was the maister—toun of al Colcos,  
And hath y—told the cause of his coming  
Un—to Oetes, of that contre king,  
Preying him that he moste doon his assay  
To gete the flees of gold, if that he may;

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

Of which the king assenteth to his bone,  
And doth him honour, as hit is to done,  
So ferforth, that his doghter and his eyr,  
Medea, which that was so wys and fair  
That fairer saw ther never man with ye,  
He made her doon to Iasoun companye  
At mete, and sitte by him in the halle.

Now was Iasoun a semely man with–alle,  
And lyk a lord, and had a greet renoun,  
And of his loke as real as leoun,  
And goodly of his speche, and famulere,  
And coude of love al craft and art plenere  
With–oute boke, with everich observaunce.  
And, as fortune her oghte a foul meschaunce,  
She wex enamoured upon this man.

"Iasoun," quod she, "for ought I see or can,  
As of this thing the which ye been aboute,  
Ye han your–self y–put in moche doute.  
For, who–so wol this aventure acheve,  
He may nat wel asterten, as I leve,  
With–outen deeth, but I his helpe be.  
But natheles, hit is my wille," quod she,  
"To forthren yow, so that ye shal nat dye,  
But turnen, sound, hoom to your Tessalye."

"My righte lady," quod this Iasoun tho,  
"That ye han of my dethe or of my wo  
Any reward, and doon me this honour,  
I wot wel that my might ne my labour  
May nat deserve hit in my lyves day;  
God thanke yow, ther I ne can ne may.  
Your man am I, and lowly you beseche,  
To been my help, with–oute more speche;  
But certes, for my deeth shal I nat spare."

Tho gan this Medea to him declare  
The peril of this cas, fro point to point,  
And of his batail, and in what disioint  
He mote stande, of which no creature,  
Save only she, ne mighte is lyf assure.  
And shortly, to the point right for to go,  
They been accorded ful, betwix hem two,  
That Iasoun shal her wedde, as trewe knight;  
And term y–set, to come sone at night  
Unto her chambre, and make ther his ooth,

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

Upon the goddes, that he, for leef ne looth,  
Ne sholde her never falsen, night ne day,  
To been her husband, whyl he liven may,  
As she that from this deeth him saved here.  
And her-upon, at night they mette y-fere,  
And doth his ooth, and goth with her to bedde.  
And on the morwe, upward he him spedde;  
For she hath taught him how he shal nat faile  
The flees to winne, and stinten his bataile;  
And saved him his lyf and his honour;  
And gat him greet name as a conquerour  
Right through the sleight of her enchantment.

Now hath Iasoun the flees, and hoom is went  
With Medea, and tresor ful gret woon.  
But unwist of her fader is she goon  
To Tessaly, with duk Iasoun her leef,  
That afterward hath broght her to mescheef.  
For as a traitour he is from her go,  
And with her lafte his yonge children two,  
And falsly hath betrayed her, allas!  
And ever in love a cheef traitour he was;  
And wedded yit the thridde wyf anon,  
That was the doghter of the kign Creon.

This is the meed of loving and guerdon  
That Medea received of Iasoun  
Right for her trouthe and for her kindenesse,  
That loved him better than her-self, I gesse,  
And lafte her fader and her heritage.  
And of Iasoun this is the vassalage,  
That, in his dayes, nas ther noon y-founde  
So fals a lover going on the grounde.  
And therfor in her lettre thus she seyde  
First, whan she of his falsnesse him umbreyde,  
"Why lyked me thy yelow heer to see  
More then the boundes of myn honestee,  
Why lyked me thy youthe and thy fairnesse,  
And of thy tonge the infinit graciousnesse?  
O, haddest thou in thy conquest deed y-be,  
Ful mikel untrouthe had ther dyed with thee!"

Wel can Ovyde her lettre in vers endyte,  
Which were as now to long for me to wryte.

Explicit Legenda Ysiphile et Medee, Martirum.



## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

### V. *THE LEGEND OF LUCRETIA. Incipit Legenda Lucrecie Rome, martiris.*

Now moot I seyn the exiling of kinges  
Of Rome, for hir horrible doinges,  
And of the laste king Tarquinius,  
As saith Ovyde and Titus Livius.  
But for that cause telle I nat this storie,  
But for to preise and drawen to memorie  
The verray wyf, the verray trewe Lucressel,  
That, for her wyfhood and her stedfastnesse,  
Nat only that thise payens her comende,  
But he, that cleped is in our legende  
The grete Austin, hath greet compassioun  
Of this Lucesse, that starf at Rome toun;  
And it what wyse, I wol but shortly trete,  
And of this thing I touche but the grete.

Whan Ardea beseged was aboute  
With Romains, that ful sterne were and stoute,  
Ful longe lay the sege, and litel wroghte,  
So that they were half ydel, as hem thoghte;  
And in his pley Tarquinius the yonge  
Gan for to iape, for he was light of tonge,  
And seyde, that "it was an ydel lyf;  
No man did ther no more that his wyf;  
And lat us speke of wyves, that is best;  
Praise every man his owne, as him lest,  
And with our speche lat us ese our herte."

A knight, that highte Colatyne, up sterte,  
And seyde thus, "nay, for hit is no nede  
To trowen on the word, but on the dede.  
I have a wyf," quod he, "that, as I trowe,  
Is holden good of alle that ever her knowe;  
Go we to-night to Rome, and we shul see."

Tarquinius answerde, "that lyketh me."  
To Rome be they come, and faste hem dighte  
To Colatynes hous, and doun they lighte,  
Tarquinius, and eek this Colatyne.  
The husbond knew the estres wel and fyne,  
And privly into the hous they goon;  
Nor at the gate porter was ther noon;  
And at the chambre-dore they abyde.  
This noble wyf sat by her beddes syde  
Dischevele, for no malice she ne thoghte;  
And softe wolle our book seith that she wroghte

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

To kepen her fro slouthe and ydelnesse;  
And bad her servants doon hir businesse,  
And axeth hem, "what tydings heren ye?  
How seith men of the sege, how shal hit be?  
God wolde the walles weren falle adoun;  
Myn husbond is so longe out of this toun,  
For which the dreed doth me so sore smerte,  
Right as a swerd hit stingeth to myn herte  
What I think on the sege or of that place;  
God save my lord, I preye him for his grace:" ---  
And ther-with-al ful tenderly she weep,  
And of her werk she took no more keep,  
But mekely she leet her eyen falle;  
And thilke semblant sat her wel with-alle.  
And eek her teres, ful of honestee,  
Embelissed her wyfly chastitee;  
Her countenance is to her herte digne,  
For they acordeden in dede and signe.  
And with that word her husbond Colatyn,  
Or she of him was war, com sterting in,  
And seide, "dreed thee noght, for I am here!"  
And she anoon up roos, with blisful chere,  
And kiste him, as of wyves is the wone.

Tarquinius, this proude kinges sone,  
Conceived hath her beautee and her chere,  
Her yelow heer, her shap, and manere,  
Her hew, her wordes that she hath compleynded,  
And by no crafte her beautee nas nat feyned;  
And caughte to this lady swich desyr,  
That in his herte brende as any fyr  
So woodly, that his wit was al forgeten.  
For wel, thoghte he, she sholde nat be geten  
And ay the more that he was in dispair,  
The more he coveteth and thoghte her fair.  
His blinde lust was al his covetinge.

A-morwe, whan the brid bragan to singe,  
Unto the sege he comth ful privily,  
And by himself he walketh sobrelly,  
Thimage of her recording alwey newe;  
"Thus lay her heer, and thus fresh was her hewe;  
Thus sat, thus spak, thus span; this was her chere,  
Thus fair she was, and this was her manere."  
Al this conceit his herte hath now y-take.  
And, as the see, with tempest al to-shake,  
That, after whan the storm is al ago,  
Yet wol the water quappe a day or two,  
Right so, thogh that her forme wer absent,

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

The plesaunce of her forme was present;  
But natheles, nat plesaunce, but delyt,  
Or an unrightful talent with despyt;  
"For, maugre her, she shal my lemman be;  
Hap helpeth hardy man alday," quod he;  
"What ende that I make, hit shal be so;"  
And girt him with his swerde, and gan to go;  
And forth he rit til he to Rome is come,  
And al aloon his wey than hath he nome.  
Unto the house of Colatyn ful right.  
Doun was the sonne, and day hath lost his light;  
And in he com un—to privy halke,  
And in the night ful theefly gan he stalke,  
Whan every night was to his reste broght,  
Ne no wight had of tresoun swich a thocht.  
Were hit by window or by other gin,  
With swerde y—drawe, shortly he comth in  
Ther as she lay, this noble wyf Lucesse.  
And, as she wook, her bed she felte presse.  
"What beste is that," quod she, "that weyeth thus?"  
"I am the kinges sone, Tarquinius,"  
Quod he, "but and thou crye, or noise make,  
Or if thou any creature awake,  
By thilke god that formed man on lyve,  
This swerd through—out thyn herte shal I ryve."  
And ther—withal unto her throte he sterte,  
And sette the point al sharp upon her herte.  
No word she spak, she hath no might therto.  
What shal she sayn? her wit is al ago.  
Right as a wolf that fynt a lomb aloon,  
To whom shal she compleyne, or make moon?  
What! shal she fighte with an hardy knight?  
Wel wot men that a woman hath no might.  
What! shal she crye, or how shal she asterte  
That hath her by the throte, with swerde at herte?  
She axeth grace, and seith al that she can.  
"Ne wolt thou nat," quod he, this cruel man,  
"As wisly Iupiter my soule save,  
As I shal in the stable slee thy knave,  
And leye him in thy bed, and loude crye,  
That I thee finde in suche avouterye;  
And thus thou shalt be deed, and also lese  
Thy name, for thou shalt non other chese."

Thise Romain wyves loveden so hir name  
At thilke tyme, and dredden so the shame,  
That, what for fere of slaundre and drede of deeth,  
She loste bothe at—ones wit and breeth,  
And in a swough she lay and wex so deed,  
Men mighte smyten of her arm or heed;

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

She feleth no-thing, neither foul ne fair.

Tarquinas, that art a kinges eyr,  
And sholdest, as by linage and by right,  
Doon as a lord and as a verray knight,  
Why hastow doon dispyt to chivalrye?  
Why hastow doon this lady vilanye?  
Allas! of thee this was a vileins dede!

But now to purpos; in the story I rede,  
Whan he was goon, al this mischaunce is falle.  
This lady sente after her frendes alle,  
Fader, moder, husbond, al y-fere;  
And al dischevele, with her heres clere,  
In habit swich as women used tho  
Unto the burying of her frendes go,  
She sit in halle with a sorweful sighte.  
Her frendes axen what her aylen mighte,  
And who was deed? And she sit ay wepinge,  
A word for shame ne may she forth out-bringe,  
Ne upon hem she dorste nat beholde.  
But atte laste of Tarquiny she hem tolde,  
This rewful cas, and al this thing horrible.  
The wo to tellen hit were impossible,  
That she and alle her frendes made atones.  
Al hadde folkes hertes been of stones,  
Hit mighte have maked hem upon her rewe,  
Her herte was so wyfly and so trewe.  
She seide, that, for her gilt ne for her blame,  
He husbond sholde nat have the foule name,  
That wolde she nat suffre, by no wey.  
And they answerden alle, upon hir fey,  
That they foryeve hit her, for hit was right;  
Hit was no gilt, hit lay nat in her might;  
And seiden her ensamples many oon.  
But al for noght; for thus she seide anoon,  
"Be as be may," quod she, "of forgiving,  
I wol nat have no forgift for no-thing."  
But prively she caughte forth a knyf,  
And therwith-al she rafte her-self her lyf;  
And as she fel adoun, she caste her look,  
And of her clothes yit she hede took;  
For in her falling yit she hadde care  
Lest that her feet or swiche thing lay bare;  
So wel she loved clenness and eek trouthe.

Of her had al the toun of Rome routhe,  
And Brutus by her chaste blode hath swore

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

That Tarquin sholde y-banisht be ther-fore,  
And al his kin; and let the peple calle,  
And openly the tale he tolde hem alle,  
And openly let carie her on a bere  
Through al the toun, that men may see and here  
The horrible deed of her oppressioun.  
Ne never was ther king in Rome toun  
Sin thilke day; and she was holden there  
A seint, and ever her day y-halwed dere  
As in hir lawe: and thus endeth Lucesse,  
The noble wyf, as Titus bereth wisse.

I tell hit, for she was of love so trewe,  
Ne in her wille she chaunged for no newe.  
And for the stable herte, sad and kinde,  
That in these women men may alday finde;  
Ther as they caste hir herte, ther hit dwelleth.  
For wel I wot, that Crist him-selve telleth,  
That in Israel, as wyd as is the lond,  
That so gret feith in al the lond he ne fond  
As in a woman; and this is no lye.  
And as of men, loketh which tirannye  
They doon alday; assay hem who so liste,  
The trewest is ful brotel for to triste.

Explicit Legenda Lucrecie Rome, Martiris.

### *VI. THE LEGEND OF ARIADNE. Incipit Legenda Adriane de Athenes.*

Iuge Infernal, Minos, of Crete king,  
Now cometh thy lot, now comestow on the ring;  
Nat for thy sake only wryte I this storie,  
But for to clepe agein unto memorie  
Of Theseus the grete untrouthe of love;  
For which the goddes of the heven above  
Ben wrothe, and wreche han take for thy sinne.  
Be reed for shame! now I thy lyf beginne.

Minos, that was the mighty king of Crete,  
That hadde an hundred citees stronge and grete,  
To scole hath sent his sone Androgeus,  
To Athenes; of the whiche hit happed thus,  
That he was slayn, lerning philosphye,  
Right in that citee, nat but for envye.

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

The grete Minos, of the whiche I speke,  
His sones deeth is comen for to wreke;  
Alcathoe he bisegeth harde and longe,  
But natheles the walles be so stronge,  
And Nisus, that was king of that citee,  
So chivalrous, that litel dredeth he;  
Of Minos or his ost took he no cure,  
Til on a day befel an aventure,  
That Nisus doghter stood upon the wal,  
And of the sege saw the maner al,  
So happed hit, that, at a scarmishing,  
She caste her herte upon Minos the king,  
For his beautee and for his chivalrye,  
So sore, that she wende for to dye.  
And, shortly of this proces for to pace,  
She made Minos winnen thilke place,  
So that the citee was al at his wille,  
To saven whom him list, or elles spille;  
But wikkedly he quitte her kindenesse,  
And let her drenche in sorowe and distresse,  
Nere that the goddes hadde of her pite;  
But that tale were to long as now for me.

Athenes wan this king Minos also,  
And Alcathoe and other tounes mo;  
And this theeffect, that Minos hath so driven  
Hem of Athenes, that they mote him yiven  
Fro yere to yere her owne children dere  
For to be slayn, as ye shul after here.

This Minos hath a monstre, a wikked beste,  
That was so cruel that, without areste,  
Whan that a man was broght in his presence,  
He wolde him ete, ther helpeth no defence.  
And every thridde yeer, with-outen doute,  
They casten lot, and, as hit com aboute

On riche, on pore, he moste his sone take,  
And of his child he moste present make  
Unto Minos, to save him or to spille,  
Or lete his beste devoure him at his wille.  
And this hath Minos don, right in despyt;  
To wreke his sone was set al his delyt,  
And maken hem of Athenes his thral  
Fro yere to yere, whyl that he liven shal;  
And hoom he saileth whan this toun is wonne.  
This wikked custom is so longe y-ronne  
Til that of Athenes king Egeus

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

Mot sende his owne sone, Theseus,  
Sith that the lot is fallen him upon,  
To be devoured, for grace is ther non.  
And forth is lad this woful yonge knight  
Unto the court of king Minos ful right,  
And in a prison, fetere, cast is he  
Til thilke tyme he sholde y-freten be.

Wel maystow wepe, O woful Theseus,  
That art a kinges sone, and dampned thus.  
Me thinketh this, that thou were depe y-holde  
To whom that saved thee fro cares colde!  
And now, if any woman helpe thee,  
Wel oughtestow her servant for to be,  
And been her trewe lover yeer by yere!  
But now to come ageyn to my matere.

The tour, ther as this Theseus is throwe  
Doun in the botom derke and wonder lowe,  
Was ioyning in the walle to a foreyne;  
And hit was longing to the doghtren tweyne  
Of king Minos, that in hir chambres grete  
Dwelten above, toward the maister-strete,  
In mochel mirthe, in Ioye and in solas.  
Not I nat how, hit happed ther, per cas,  
As Theseus compleyned him by nighte,  
The kinges doghter, Adrian that highte,  
And eek her suster Phedra, herden al  
His compleyning, as they stode on the wal  
And lokeden upon the brighte mone;  
Hem leste nat to go to bedde sone.  
And of his wo they had compassioun;  
A kinges sone to ben in swich prisoun  
And be devoured, thoughte hem gret pitee.

Than Adrian spak to her suster free,  
And seyde, "Phedra, leve suster dere,  
This woful lordes sone may ye nat here,  
How pitously compleyneth he his kin,  
And eek his pore estat that he is in,  
And gilteless? now certes, hit is routhe!  
And if ye wol assenten, by my trouthe,  
He shal be holpen, how so that we do!"

Phedra answerde, "y-wis, me is as wo  
For him as ever I was for any man;  
And, to his help, the beste reed I can

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

Is that we doon the gayler prively  
To come, and speke with us hastily,  
And doon this woful man with him to come.  
For if he may this monstre overcome,  
Than were he quit; ther is noon other bote.  
Lat us wel taste him at his herte-rote,  
That, if so be that he a wepen have,  
Wher that he dar, his lyf to kepe and save,  
Fighten with this fend, and him defende.  
For, in the prison, ther he shal descende,  
Ye wite wel, that the beste is in a place  
That nis nat derk, and hath roum eek and space  
To welde an ax or swerd or staf or knyf,  
So that, me thinketh, he sholde save his lyf;  
If that he be a man, he shal do so.  
And we shul make him balles eek also  
Of wexe and towe, that, whan he gapeth faste,  
Into the bestes throte he shal hem caste  
To slake his hunger and encombred his teeth;  
And right anon, whan that Theseus seeth  
The beste achoked, he shal on him lepe  
To sleen him, or they comen more to-hepe.  
This wepen shal the gayler, or that tyde,  
Ful prively within the prison hyde;  
And, for the hous is crinkled to and fro,  
And hath so queinte weyes for to go —  
For hit is shapen as the mase is wrought —  
Therto have I a remedie in my thocht,  
That, by a clewe of twyne, as he hath goon,  
The same wey he may returne anoon,  
Folwing alwey the threed, as he hath come.  
And, what that he this beste hath overcome,  
Then may he fleen away out of this drede,  
And eek the gayler may he with him lede,  
And him avaunce at hoom in his contree,  
Sin that so greet a lordes sone is he.  
This is my reed, if that he dar hit take."

What sholde I lenger sermoun of hit make?  
The gayler cometh, and with him Theseus.  
And whan these thinges been acorded thus,  
Adoun sit Theseus upon his knee: —  
"The righte lady of my lyf," quod he,  
"I, sorweful man, y-dampned to the deeth,  
Fro yow, whyl that me lasteth lyf or breath,  
I wol nat twinne, after this aventure,  
But in your servise thus I wol endure,  
That, as a wrecche unknowe, I wol yow serve  
For ever-mo, til that myn herte sterve.  
Forsake I wol at hoom myn heritage,



## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

And, as I seide, ben of your court a page,  
If that ye vouche—sauſ that, in this place,  
Ye graunte me to han so gret a grace  
That I may han nat but my mete and drinke;  
And for my sustenance yit wol I swinke,  
Right as yow list, that Minos ne no wight —  
Sin that he saw me never with eyen sight —  
Ne no man elles, shal me conne espye;  
So slyly and so wel I shal me gye,  
And me so wel disfigure and so lowe,  
That in this world ther shal no man me knowe,  
To han my lyf, and for to han presence  
Of yow, that doon to me this excellence.  
And to my fader shal I senden here  
This worthy man, that is now your gaylere,  
And, him to guerdon, that he shal wel be  
Oon of the grettest men of my contree.  
And yif I dorste seyn, my lady bright,  
I am a kinges sone, and eek a knight;  
As wolde god, yif that hit mighte be  
Ye weren in my contree, alle three,  
And I with yow, to bere yow companye,  
Than shulde ye seen yif that I ther—of lye!  
And, if I profre yow in low manere  
To ben your page and serven yow right here,  
But I yow serve as lowly in that place,  
I prey to Mara to yive me swiche a grace  
That shames deeth on me ther mote falle,  
And deeth and povert to my frendes alle;  
And that my spirit by nighte mote go  
After my deeth, and walke to and fro;  
That I mote of a traitour have a name,  
For which my spirit go, to do me shame!  
And yif I ever claime other degree,  
But—if ye vouche—sauſ to yive hit me,  
As I have seid, of shames deeth I deye!  
And mercy, lady! I can nat elles seye!"

A seemly knight was Theseus to see,  
And yong, but of a twenty yeer and three;  
But who—so hadde y—seyn his countenance,  
He wolde have wept, for routhe of his penaunce;  
For which this Adriane in this manere  
Answerde to his profre and to his chere.

"A kinges sone, and eek a knight," quod she,  
"To been my servant in so low degree,  
God shilde hit, for the shame of women alle!  
And leve me never swich a cas befall!"

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

But sende yow grace and sleighte of herte also,  
Yow to defende and knightly sleen your fo,  
And leve hereafter that I may yow finde  
To me and to my suster here so kinde,  
That I repente nat to give yow lyf!  
Yit were hit better that I were your wyf,  
Sin that ye been as gentil born as I,  
And have a reaume, nat but faste by,  
Then that I suffred giltles yow to sterve,  
Or that I let yow as a page serve;  
Hit is not profit, as unto your kinrede;  
But what is that that man nil do for drede?  
And to my suster, sin that hit is so  
That she mot goon with me, if that I go,  
Or elles suffre deeth as wel as I,  
That ye unto your sone as trewely  
Doon her be wedded at your hoom—coming.  
This is the fynal ende of al this thing;  
Ye swere hit heer, on al that may be sworn."

"Ye, lady myn," quod he, "or elles torn  
Mote I be with the Minotaur to—morwe!  
And haveth her—of my herte—blood to borwe,  
Yif that ye wile; if I had knyf or spere,  
I wolde hit leten out, and ther—on swere,  
For than at erst I wot ye wil me leve.  
By Mars, that is the cheef of my bileve,  
So that I mighte liven and nat faile  
To—morwe for tacheve my bataile,  
I nolde never fro this place flee,  
Til that ye shuld the verray preve see.  
For now, if that the sooth I shal yow say,  
I have y—loved yow ful many a day,  
Thogh ye ne wiste hit nat, in my contree.  
And aldermost desyred yow to see  
Of any erthly living creature;  
Upon my trouthe I swere, and yow assure,  
These seven yeer I have your servant be;  
Now have I yow, and also have ye me,  
My dere herte, of Athenes duchesse!"

This lady smyleth at his stedfastnesse,  
And at his hertly wordes, and his chere,  
And to her suster seide in this manere,  
Al softely, "now, suster myn," quod she,  
"Now be we duchesses, bothe I and ye,  
And sikered to the regals of Athenes,  
And bothe her—after lykly to be quenes,  
And saved fro his deeth a kinges sone,

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

As ever of gentil women is the wone  
To save a gentil man, emforth hir might,  
In honest cause, and namely in his right.  
Me thinketh no wight oghte her—of us blame,  
Ne beren us ther—for an evel name."

And shortly of this matere for to make,  
This Theseus of her hath leve y—take,  
And every point performed was in dede  
As ye have in this covenant herd me rede.  
His wepen, his clew, his thing that I have said,  
Was by the gayler in the hous y—laid  
Ther as this Minotaur hath his dwelling,  
Right faste by the dore, at his entring.  
And Theseus is lad unto his deeth,  
And forth un—to this Minotaur he geeth,  
And by the teching of this Adriane  
He overcom this beste, and was his bane;  
And out he cometh by the clewe again  
Ful prevely, whan he this beste hath slain;  
And by the gayler geten hath a barge,  
And of his wyves tresor gan hit charge,  
And took his wyf, and eek her suster free,  
And eek the gayler, and with hem alle three  
Is stole away out of the lond by nighte,  
And to the contre of Ennopye him dighte  
Ther as he had a frend of his knowinge.  
Ther fasten they, ther dauneen they and singe;  
And in his armes hath this Adriane,  
That of the beste hath kept him from his bane;  
And gat him ther a newe barge anoon,  
And of his contree—folk a ful gret woon,  
And taketh his leve, and hoomward saileth he.  
And in an yle, amid the wilde see,  
Ther as ther dwelte creature noon  
Save wilde bestes, and that ful many oon,  
He made his ship a—londe for to sette;  
And in that yle half a day he lette,  
And seide, that on the lond he moste him reste.  
His mariners han doon right as him leste;  
And, for to tellen shortly in this cas,  
Whan Adriane his wyf a—slepe was,  
For that her suster fairer was than she,  
He taketh her in his hond, and forth goth he  
To shippe, and as a traitour stal his way  
Whyl that this Adriane a—slepe lay,  
And to his contree—ward he saileth blyve --  
A twenty devil way the wind him dryve! --  
And fond his fader drenched in the see.

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

Me list no more to speke of him, parde;  
Thise false lovers, poison be hir bane!  
But I wol turne again to Adriane  
That is with slepe for werinesse atake.  
Ful sorwefully her herte may awake.  
Allas! for thee my herte hath now pite!  
Right in the dawning awaketh she,  
And gropeth in the bedde, and fond right nocht.  
"Allas!" quode she, "that ever I was wrought!  
I am betrayed!" and her heer to-rente,  
And to the stronde bar-fot faste she wente,  
And cryed, "Theseus! myn herte swete!  
Wher be ye, that I may nat with yow mete,  
And mighte thus with bestes been y-slain?"

The holwe rokkes answerde her again;  
No man she saw, and yit shyned the mone,  
And hye upon a rokke she wente sone,  
And saw his barge sailing in the see.  
Cold wex her herte, and right thus seide she.  
"Meker than ye finde I the bestes wilde!"  
Hadde he nat sinne, that her thus begylde?  
She cryed, "O turne again, for routhe and sinne!  
Thy barge hath nat al his meiny inne!"  
Her kerchef on a pole up stikked she,  
Ascaunce that he sholde hit wel y-see,  
And him remembre that she was behinde,  
And turne again, and on the stronde her finde;  
But al for nocht; his wey he is y-goon.  
And doun she fil a-swown upon a stoon;  
And up she rist, and kiste, in al her care,  
The steppes of his feet, ther he hath fare,  
And to her bedde right thus she speketh tho: —  
"Thou bed," quod she, "that hast receyved two,  
Thou shalt answer of two, and nat of oon!  
Wher is thy gretter part away y-goon?  
Allas! wher shal I, wrecched wight, become!  
For, thogh so be that ship or boot heer come,  
Hoom to my contree dar I nat for drede;  
I can my-selven in this cas nat rede!"

What shal I telle more her compleining?  
Hit is so long, hit were an hevvy thing.  
In her epistle Naso telleth al;  
But shortly to the ende I telle shal.  
The goddes have her holpen, for pitee;  
And, in the signe of Taurus, men may see  
The stones of her coroun shyne clere. —

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

I wol no more speke of this matere;  
But thus this false lover can begyle  
His trewe love. The devil quyte him his wyle!

Explicit Legenda Adriane de Athenes.

### *VII. THE LEGEND OF PHILOMELA. Incipit Legenda Philomene.*

Deus dator formarum.

Thou yiver of the formes, that hast wrought  
The faire world, and bare hit in thy thought  
Eternally, or thou thy werk began,  
Why madest thou, unto the slaundre of man,  
Or -- al be that hit was not thy doing,  
As for that fyn to make swiche a thing --  
Why suffrest thou that Tereus was bore,  
That is in love so fals and so forswore,  
That, fro this world up to the firste hevене,  
Corrupeth, whan that folk his name nevene?  
And, as to me, so grisly was his dede,  
That, whan that I his foule story rede,  
Myn eyen wexen foule and sore also;  
Yit last the venim of so longe ago,  
That hit enfecteth him that wol beholde  
The story of Tereus, of which I tolde.

Of Trace was he lord, and kin to Marte,  
The cruel god that stant with bloody darte;  
And wedded had he, with a blisful chere,  
King Pandiones faire doghter dere,  
That highte Progne, flour of her contree,  
Thogh Iuno list nat at the feste be,  
Ne Ymeneus, that god of wedding is;  
But at the feste redy been, y-wise,  
The furies three, with alle hir mortel brond.  
The owle al night aboute the balkes wond,  
That prophet is of wo and of mischaunce.  
This revel, ful of songe and ful of daunce,  
Lasteth a fourteenight, or litel lasse.  
But, shortly of this story for to passe,  
For I am wery of him for to telle,  
Five yeer his wyf and he togeder dwelle,  
Til on a day she gan so sore longe  
To seen her suster, that she saw nat longe,

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

That for desyr she niste what to seye.  
But to her husband gan she for to preye,  
For goddes love, that she moste ones goon  
Her suster for to seen, and come anoon,  
Or elles, but she moste to her wende,  
She preyde him, that he wolde after her sende;  
And this was, day by day, al her prayere  
With al humblesse of wyfhood, word, and chere.

This Theseus let make his shippes yare,  
And into Grece him—self is forth y—fare  
Unto his fader in lawe, and gan him preye  
To vouche—sauf that, for a month or tweye,  
That Philomene, his wyves suster, mighte  
On Progne his wyf but ones have a sighte —  
"And she shal come to yow again anoon.  
Myself with her wol bothe come and goon,  
And as myn hertes lyf I wol her kepe."

This olde Pandion, this king, gan wepe  
For tendernesse of herte, for to leve  
His doghter goon, and for to yive her leve;  
Of al this world he lovede no—thing so;  
But at the laste leve hath she to go.  
For Philomene, with salte teres eke,  
Gan of her fader grace to beseke  
To seen her suster, that her longeth so;  
And him embraceth with her armes two.  
And therwith—al so yon and fair was she  
That, whan that Tereus saw her beautee,  
And of array that ther was noon her liche,  
And yit of bountee was she two so riche,  
He caste his fyry herte upon her so  
That he wol have her, how so that hit go,  
And with his wyles kneled and so preyde,  
Til at the laste Pandion thus seyde: —

"Now, sone," quod he, "that art to me so dere,  
I thee betake my yonge doghter here,  
That bereth the key of al my hertes lyf.  
And grete wel my doghter and thy wyf,  
And yive her leve somtyme for to pleye,  
That she may seen me ones er I deye."  
And soothly, he hath mad him riche feste,  
And to his folk, the moste and eek the leste,  
That with him com; and yaf him yiftes grete,  
And him conveyeth through the maister—strete  
Of Athenes, and to the see him broghte,

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

And turneth hoom; no malice he ne thoghte.

The ores pulleth forth the vessel faste,  
And into Thrace arriveth at the laste,  
And up into a forest he her ledde,  
And to a cave privily him spedde;  
And, in this derke cave yif her leste,  
Or leste noghte, he bad her for to reste;  
Of whiche her herte agroos, and seyde thus,  
"Wher is my suster, brother Tereus?"  
And therwith-al she wept tenderly,  
And quook for fere, pale and pitously,  
Right as the lamb that of the wolf is biten;  
Or as the colver, that of the egle is smiten,  
And is out of his clawes forth escaped,  
Yet hit is afered and awhaped  
Lest hit be hent eft-sones, so sat she.  
But utterly hti may non other be.  
By force hath he, this traitour, doon that dede,  
That he hath reft her of her maydenhede,  
Maugree her heed, by strengthe and by his might.  
Lo! here a dede of men, and that a right!  
She cryeth "suster!" with ful londe stevene,  
And "fader dere!" and "help me, god in hevене!"  
Al helpeth nat; and yet this false theef  
Hath doon this lady yet a more mischief,  
For fere lest she sholde his shame crye,  
And doon him openly a vilanye,  
And with his swerd her tong of kerveth he,  
And in a castel made her for to be  
Ful privily in prison evermore,  
And kepte her to his usage and his store,  
So that she mighte him nevermore asterte.  
O sely Philomene! wo is thyn herte;  
God wreke thee, and sende thee thy bone!  
Now is hit tyme I make an ende sone.

This Tereus is to his wyf y-come,  
And in his armes hath his wyf y-come,  
And pitously he weep, and shook his heed,  
And swor her that he fond her suster deed;  
For which this sely Progne hath swich wo,  
That ny her sorweful herte brak a-two;  
And thus in teres lete I Progne dwelle,  
And of her suster forth I wol yow telle.

This woful lady lerned had in youthe  
So that she werken and enbrouden couthe,

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

And weven in her stole the radevore  
As hit of women hath be woned yore.  
And, shortly for to seyn, she hath her fille  
Of mete and drink, and clothing at her wille,  
And coude eek rede, and wel y-nogh endyte,  
But with a penne coude she nat wryte;  
But lettres can she weven to and fro,  
So that, by that the yeer was al a-go,  
She had y-woven in a stamin large  
How she was broght from Athenes in a barge,  
And in a cave how that she was broght;  
And al the thing that Tereus hath wroght,  
She waf hit wel, and wroot the story above,  
How she was served for her suster love;  
And to a knave a ring she yaf anoon,  
And prayed him, by signes, for to goon  
Unto the quene, and beren her that clooth,  
And by signes swor him many an ooth,  
She sholde him yeve what she geten mighte.

This knave anoon unto the quene him dighte,  
And took hit her, and al the maner tolde.  
And, whan that Progne hath this thing beholde,  
No work she spak, for sorwe and eek for rage;  
But feyned her to goon on pilgrimage  
To Bachus temple; and, in a litel stounde,  
Her dombe suster sitting hath she founde,  
Weping in the castel her aloon.  
Allas! the wo, the compleint, and the moon  
That Progne upon her dombe suster maketh!  
In armes everich of hem other taketh,  
And thus I lete hem in hir sorwe dwelle.

The remenant is no charge for to telle,  
For this is al and som, thus was she served,  
That never harm a-gilte ne deserved  
Unto this cruel man, that she of wiste.  
Ye may be war of men, yif that yow liste.  
For, al be that he wol nat, for his shame,  
Doon so as Tereus, to lese his name,  
Ne serve yow as a mordrour or a knave,  
Ful litel whyle shul ye trewe him have,  
That wol I seyn, al were he now my brother,  
But hit so be that he may have non other.

Explicit Legenda Philomene.



## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

### *VIII. THE LEGEND OF PHYLLIS. Incipit Legenda Phillis.*

By preve as wel as by auctoritee,  
That wikked fruit cometh of a wikked tree,  
That may ye finde, if that it lyketh yow.  
But for this ende I speke this as now,  
To telle you of false Demophon.  
In love a falsher herde I never non,  
But—if hit were his fader Theseus.  
"God, for his grace, fro swich oon kepe us!"  
Thus may these women prayen that hit here.  
Now to theeffect turne I of my matere.

Destroyed is of Troye the citee;  
This Demophon com sailing in the see  
Toward Athenes, to his paleys large;  
With him com many a ship and many a barge  
Ful of his folk, of which ful many oon  
Is wounded sore, and seek, and wo begoon.  
And thay han at the sege longe y-lain.  
Behinde him com a wind and eek a rain  
That shoof so sore, his sail ne mighte stonde,  
Him were lever than al the world a-londe,  
So hunteth him the tempest to and fro.  
So derk hit was, he coude nowher go;  
And with a wawe brosten was his stere.  
His ship was rent so lowe, in swich manere,  
That carpenter ne coude hit nat amende.  
The see, by nighte, as any torche brende  
For wood, and posseth him now up now down,  
Til Neptune hath of him compassioun,  
And Thetis, Chorus, Triton, and they alle,  
And maden him upon a lond to falle,  
Wher-of that Phillis lady was and quene,  
Ligurgus doghter, fairer on to sene  
Than is the flour again the brighte sonne.  
Unnethe is Demophon to londe y-wonne,  
Wayk and eek wery, and his folk for-pyned  
Of werinesse, and also enfamyned;  
And to the deeth he almost was y-driven.  
His wyse folk to conseil han him yiven  
To seken help and socour of the queen,  
And loken what his grace mighte been,  
And maken in that lond som chevisaunce,  
To kepen him fro wo and fro mischaunce.  
For seek was he, and almost at the deeth;  
Unnethe mighte he speke or drawe his breeth,  
And lyth in Rodopeya him for to reste.  
Whan he may walke, him thoughte hit was the beste

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

Unto the court to seken for socour.  
Men knewe him wel, and diden him honour;  
For at Athenes duk and lord was he,  
As Theseus his fader hadde y-be,  
That in his tyme was of greet renoun,  
No man so greet in al his regioun;  
And lyk his fader of face and of stature,  
And fals of love; hit com him of nature;  
As doth the fox Renard, the foxes sone,  
Of kinde he coude his olde faders wone  
Withoute lore, as can a drake swimme,  
Whan hit is caught and caried to the brimme.  
This honourable Phillis doth him chere,  
her lyketh wel his port and his manere.  
But for I am agroted heer-biforn  
To wryte of hem that been in love forsworn,  
And eek to haste me in my legende,  
Which to performe god me grace sende,  
Therfor I passe shortly in this wyse;  
Ye han wel herd of Theseus devyse  
In the betraising of fair Adriane,  
That of her pite kepte him from his bane.  
At shorte wordes, right so Demophon  
The same wey, the same path hath gon  
That dide his false fader Theseus.  
For unto Phillis hath he sworn thus,  
To wedden her, and her his trouthe plighte,  
And piked of her al the good he mighte,  
Whan he was hool and sound and hadde his reste;  
And doth with Phillis what so that him leste.  
And wel coude I, yif that me leste so,  
Tellen al his doing to and fro.

He seide, unto his contree moste he saile,  
For ther he wolde her wedding apparaile  
As fil to her honour and his also.  
And openly he took his leve tho,  
And hath her sworn, he wolde nat soiorne,  
But in a month he wolde again retorne.  
And in that lond let make his ordinaunce  
As verray lord, and took the obeisaunce  
Wel and hoomly, and let his shippe dighte,  
And hoom he goth the nexte wey be mighte;  
For unto Phillis yit ne com he nocht.  
And that hath she so harde and sore aboght,  
Allas! that, as the stories us recorde,  
She was her owne deeth right with a corde,  
Whan that she saw that Demophon her trayed.

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

But to him first she wroot and faste him prayed  
He wolde come, and her deliver of peyne,  
As I reherse shal a word or tweyne.  
Me list nat vouche—sauf on him to swinke,  
Ne spende on him a penne ful of inke,  
For fals in love was he, right as his syre;  
The devil sette hir soules both a—fyre!  
But of the lettre of Phillis wol I wryte  
A word or tweyne, al—thogh hit be but lyte.

"Thyn hostesse," quod she, "O Demophon,  
Thy Phillis, which that is so wo begon,  
Of Rodopeye, upon yow moot compleyne,  
Over the terme set betwix us tweyne,  
That ye ne holden forward, as ye seyde;  
Your anker, which ye in our haven leyde,  
Highte us, that ye wolde comen, out of doute,  
Or that the mone ones wente aboute.  
But tymes foure the mone hath hid her face  
Sin thilke day ye wente fro this place,  
And foure tymes light the world again.  
But for al that, yif I shal soothly sain,  
Yit hath the streem of Sitho nat y—brought  
From Athenes the ship; yit comth hit nocht.  
And, yif that ye the terme rekne wolde,  
As I or other trewe lovers sholde,  
I pleyne not, god wot, befor my day," —

But al her lettre wryten I ne may  
By ordre, for hit were to me a charge,  
Her lettre was right long and ther—to large;  
But here and there in ryme I have hit laid,  
Ther as me thoughte that she wel hath said, —

She seide, "thy sailes comen nat again,  
Ne to thy word ther nis no fey certein;  
But I wot why ye come nat," quod she;  
"For I was of my love to you so free.  
And of the goddes that ye han forswore,  
Yif that hir vengeance falle on yow therfore,  
Ye be nat suffisaunt to bere the peyne.  
To moche trusted I, wel may I pleyne,  
Upon your linage and your faire tonge,  
And on your teres falsly out y—wronge.  
How coude ye wepe so by craft?" quod she;  
May ther swiche teres feyned be?  
Now certes, yif ye wolde have in memorie,  
Hit oghte be to yow but litel glorie

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

To have a sely mayde thus betrayed!  
To god," quod she, "preye I, and ofte have prayed,  
That hit be now the grettest prys of alle,  
And moste honour that ever yow shal befall!  
And whan thyne olde auncestres peynted be,  
In which men may hir worthinesse see,  
Than, preye I god, thou peynted be also,  
That folk may reden, for-by as they go,  
"Lo! this is he, that with his flaterye  
Betrayed hath and doon her vilanye  
That was his trewe love in thoghte and dede!"  
But sothly, of oo point yit may they rede,  
That ye ben lyk your fader as in this;  
For he begyled Adriane, y-wis,  
With swiche an art and swiche sotelte  
As thou thy-selven hast begyled me.  
As in that point, al-thogh hit be nat fayr,  
Thou folwest him, certein, and art his eyr.  
But sin thus sinfully ye me begyle,  
My body mote ye seen, within a whyle,  
Right in the haven of Athenes fleting,  
With-outen sepulture and buryinge;  
Thogh ye ben harder then is any stoon."

And, whan this lettre was forth sent anoon,  
And knew how brotel and how fals he was,  
She for dispeyr for-dide herself, allas!  
Swich sorwe hath she, for she besette her so,  
Be war, ye women, of your sotil fo,  
Sin yit this day men may ensample see;  
And trusteth, as in love, no man but me.

Explicit Legenda Phillis.

### *IX. THE LEGEND OF HYPERMNESTRA. Incipit Legenda Ypermistre.*

In Grece whylom weren brethren two,  
Of whiche that oon was called Danao,  
That many a sone hath of his body wonne,  
As swiche false lovers ofte conne.  
Among his sones alle ther was oon  
That aldermost he lovede of everichoon.  
And whan this child was born, this Danao  
Shoop him a name, and called him Lino.  
That other brother called was Egiste,  
That was of love as fals as ever him liste,  
And many a doghter gat he in his lyve;

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

Of which he gat upon his righte wyve  
A doghter dere, and dide her for to calle  
Ypermistra, yongest of hem alle;  
The whiche child, of her nativitee,  
To alle gode thewes born was she,  
As lyked to the goddes, or she was born,  
That of the shefe she sholde be the corn;  
The Wirdes, that we clepen Destinee,  
Hath shapen her that she mot nedes be  
Pitouse, sadde, wyse, and trewe as steel;  
And to this woman hit accordeth weel.  
For, though that Venus yaf her greet beautee,  
With Iupiter compouned so was she  
That conscience, trouthe, and dreed of shame,  
And of her wyfhood for to kepe her name,  
This, thoughte her, was felicitee as here.  
And rede Mars was, that tyme of the yere,  
So feble, that his malice is him raft,  
Repressed hath Venus his cruel craft;  
What with Venus and other oppressioun  
Of houses, Mars his venim is adoun,  
That Ypermistra dar nat handle a knyf  
In malice, thogh she sholde lese her lyf.  
But natheles, as heven gan tho turne,  
To badde aspectes hath she of Saturne,  
That made her for to deyen in prisoun,  
As I shal after make menciouun.

To Danao and Egistes also --  
Al-though so be that they were brethren two,  
For thilke tyme nas spared no linage --  
Hit lyked hem to maken mariage  
Betwix Ypermistra and him Lino,  
And casten swiche a day hit shal be so;  
And ful acorded was hit witterly;  
The array is wroght, the tyme is faste by.  
And thus Lino hath of his fadres brother  
The doghter wedded, and eche of him hath other.

The torches brennen and the lampes brighte,  
The sacrifices been ful redy dighte;  
Thencena out of the fyre reketh sote,  
The flour, the leef is rent up by the rote  
To marken garlands and corounes hye;  
Ful is the place of soun of minstralcye,  
Of songes amorous of mariage,  
As thilke tyme was the pleyn usage.  
And this ws in the paleys of Egiste,  
That in his hous was lord, right as him liste;

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

And thus the day they dryven to an ende;  
The frendes taken leve, and hoom they wende.  
The night is come, the bryd shal go to bedde;  
Egiste to his chambre faste him spedde,  
And privily he let his doghter calle.  
Whan that the hous was voided of hem alle,  
He loked on his doghter with glad chere,  
And to her spak, as ye shul after here.

"My righte doghter, tresor of myn herte!  
Sin first that day that shapen was my sherte,  
Or by the fatal sustren had my dom,  
So ny myn herte never thing me com  
As thou, myn Ypermistra, doghter dere!  
Tak heed what I thy fader sey thee here,  
And werk after thy wyser ever-mo.  
For alderfirste, doghter, I love thee so  
That al the world to me nis half so leef;  
Ne I nolde rede thee to thy mischeef  
For al the gode under the colde mone;  
And what I mene, hit shal be seid right sone,  
With protesacioun, as in this wyse,  
That, but thou do as I shal thee devyse,  
Thou shalt be deed, by him that al hath wrought!  
At shorte wordes, thou nescapest noght  
Out of my paleys, or that thou be deed,  
But thou consente and werke after my reed;  
Tak this to thee for ful conclusioun."

This Ypermistra caste her eyen doun,  
And quook as dooth the leef of aspe grene;  
Deed wex her hewe, and lyk as ash to sene,  
And seyde, "lord and fader, al your wille,  
After my mighte, god wot, I shal fulfille,  
So hit to me be no confusioun."

"I nil," quod he, "have noon excepcioun;"  
And out he caughte a knyf, as rasour kene;  
"Hyd this," quod he, "that hit be nat y-sene;  
And, whan thyn husbond is to bedde y-go,  
Whyl that he slepeth, cut his throte a-two.  
For in my dremes hit is warned me  
How that my newew shal my bane be,  
But whiche I noot, wherfor I wol be siker.  
Yif thou sey nay, we two shul have a biker  
As I have seyde, by him that I have sworn."

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

This Ypermistra hath ny her wit forlon;  
And, for to passen harmles of that place,  
She graunted him; ther was non other grace.  
And therwith—al a costrel taketh he,  
And seyde, "herof a draught, or two or three,  
Yif him to drinke, whan he goth to reste,  
And he shal slepe as longe as ever thee leste,  
The narcotiks and opies been so stronge:  
And go thy wey, lest that him thinke longe."

Out comth the bryd, and with ful sober chere,  
As is of maidens ofte the manere,  
To chambre is broght with revel and with songe,  
And shortly, lest this tale be to longe,  
This Lino and she ben sone broght to bedde;  
And every wight out at the dore him spedde.

The night is wasted, and he fel a—slepe;  
Ful tenderly beginneth she to wepe.  
She rist her up, and dredfully she quaketh,  
As doth the braunche that Zephirus shaketh,  
And husht were alle in Argon that citee.  
As cold as any frost now wexeth she;  
For pite by the herte her streyneth so,  
And dred of death doth her so moche wo,  
That thryes doun she fil in swiche a were.  
She rist her up, and shakereth heer and there,  
And on her handes faste loketh she.  
"Allas! and shul my handes bloody be?  
I am a maid, and, as by my nature,  
And by my semblant and by my vesture,  
Myn handes been nat shapen for a knyf,  
As for to reve no man fro his lyf.  
What devil have I with the knyf to do?  
And shal I have my throte corve a—two?  
Than shal I blede, allas! And me beshende;  
And nedes cost this thing mot have an ende;  
Or he or I mot nedes lese our lyf.  
Now certes," quod she, "sin I am his wyf,  
And hath my feith, yit is it bet for me  
For to be deed in wyily honestee  
Than be a traitour living in my shame.  
Be as be may, for earnest or for game,  
He shal awake, and ryse and go his way  
Out at this goter, or that hit be day!" —  
And weep ful tenderly upon his face,  
And in her armes gan him to embrace,  
And him she rogeth and awaketh softe;  
And at the window leep he fro the lofte

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

Whan she hath warned him, and doon him bote.

This Lino swifte was, and light of fote,  
And from his wyf he ran a ful good pas.  
This sely woman is so wayk, allas!  
And helples so, that, or that she fer wente,  
Her cruel fader dide her for to hente.  
Allas! Lino! why art thou so unkinde?  
Why ne haddest thou remembred in thy minde  
To taken her, and lad her forth with thee?  
For, what she saw that goon away was he,  
And that she mighte nat so faste go,  
Ne folwen him, she sette her doun right tho,  
Til she was caught and fetered in prisoun.

This tale is seid for this conclusioun....