

*The Floure and the Leafe*

*The Assembly of Ladies*

*The Isle of Ladies*

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## *The Flooure and the Leafe*

### *Introduction*

The only authoritative text of *FL* is that which Thomas Speght introduced into his first edition (1598) of Chaucer's Collected Works, though there is a contemporary list of contents in the late fifteenth-century manuscript Longleat 258 (which also contains *The Assembly of Ladies*) which suggests that *FL* once occupied pages now lost in that manuscript. In including *FL*, Speght was following the practice of his sixteenth-century predecessors by enlarging his edition of Chaucer with the addition of works that could plausibly be attributed to the poet, and *FL* remained in the Chaucer canon, as one of the most admired of his poems, until expelled by Henry Bradshaw on the basis of rhyme-tests in 1868. The attribution to Chaucer is totally without historical foundation. Skeat printed a text of *FL* in the supplement to his great edition of Chaucer, *Chaucerian and Other Pieces*, in 1897, with valuable introduction and notes, and with the text restored to its presumed original near-Chaucerian form (it was actually probably written about 1460–80) by means of very extensive conjectural emendation of grammar and spelling. In this he was extremely skillful, but a modern editor, faced with a unique text of a poem at least a hundred years later than the date of composition of that poem, is less likely to engage in such wholesale reconstruction, and Pearson, in the standard modern edition of the poem (1962), made only such changes in Speght's text as were necessary to restore sense. These changes are incorporated silently in the present text.

*FL* takes its origin from the real or supposed courtly cult of the Flower and the Leaf to which Chaucer refers in the Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women* and to which Deschamps had referred before him (and Charles d'Orléans after, in the English poems written in his captivity, 1415–40). Knights and ladies would declare their adherence to the Flower or the Leaf and maintain the propriety of their choice with no doubt elegant and sophisticated casuistry. The poet of *FL* gives a fresh twist to the debate by moralizing adherence to the Flower and the Leaf in terms of a contrast between perseverance and fidelity in love and fashionable fickleness and flirtation, and between honor and valor in battle and idleness.

### *The Floure and the Leaf*

This contrast is developed in the poem with a wealth of allegorical and metaphorical suggestion. The flower, which is fading and transitory, in reality as well as in some famous biblical contexts (e.g., Isaiah 40:6–8, Psalm 1:3), is contrasted with the leaf (of certain evergreen trees, especially the laurel), which is enduring; the nightingale (female), which sings of faithful and betrayed love, is contrasted with the more light-hearted goldfinch (male); the medlar, which only ripens in decay, is contrasted with the evergreen leaf and with the woodbine, symbolic of faithful attachment. The company of the Leaf engage in singing and dancing together, but only after the ladies have done their own service to the Leaf through song and dance, and the knights have jested; the company of the Flower arrive with minstrels and proceed immediately to promiscuous singing and dancing and to worship of the daisy (where our poet either forgets or repudiates the traditional role of the daisy or *marguerite* in Chaucer and the French poets). The great storm that follows is nicely symbolic and not too unlikely in terms of English weather (an early summer hailstorm with sharp extremes of temperature): those who shelter under the laurel are protected, so to speak, by their loyalty and fidelity in love from the extremes of passion to which those more light of love are subject. The moral contrasts are unambiguous, but they are not ruthlessly pressed home: the company of the Leaf are very sympathetic to the distress of the company of the Flower after the storm, even to the extent of gathering *salades* for them to eat — not the only time the poem has the air of a modern guide to wholesome living. The ladies of the Leaf and the Flower treat each other with exquisite politeness, and the guide that the poet meets and who explains the allegory can find no worse rebuke for the followers of the Flower than that they are ‘idle.’

The poem is cast in the conventional form of the allegorical love-vision, and there are many echoes of Chaucer, Lydgate, and the French poets (Guillaume de Lorris, Guillaume Machaut, Jean Froissart, and Eustache Deschamps), particularly in the elaborate seasonal and garden setting. At the same time, the poem is also in some ways highly unconventional: it is, for one thing, a ‘dream-poem’ in which the narrator fails to fall asleep; furthermore, the carefully contrived arbor-setting is used only as a vantage point from which the narrator has a view of events in the wide meadow beyond. In this, and in other ways, there is a sense that the boundaries of traditional allegorical love-vision are being deliberately tested. Most striking of all is the representation of the narrator as a woman: though not unprecedented, this is quite unusual, and has to do, presumably, with a tradition that women above all are concerned with the service of the Flower and the Leaf and with questions of loyalty and constancy. On the other hand, the emphasis in the explanation of the allegory is much more upon the duties of knights

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to fight valiantly and not to be idle than upon the opposition between constancy and fickleness in love. The exhortation seems very close to Malory's complaints about the idle habits of present-day knights or to his vivid contrast between the stable and constant love between men and women in the old days (King Arthur's days) and 'the love nowadayes, sone hote sone colde' (*Works*, ed. E. Vinaver, III.1119).

Whether the poem is actually by a woman is a question which no ingenuity, it seems, could solve, though prejudice might point a way. The poem is pervaded by an extraordinary charm and sweet reasonableness: it breathes through and softens even distressing moments and potentially severe moral judgments. It reads like a poem that Jane Bennet (of *Pride and Prejudice*) might have written. The imitation of Chaucer is intimate, though not without its awkwardness: syntax is sometimes a little less under control than one might have expected, and the versification, if all its defects are due to scribes, must have undergone an exceptionally thorough process of corruption at their hands. The rhyme royal stanza is treated in a remarkably free and un-Chaucerian manner, with little attempt to match sense to stanza-unit or to natural divisions within the stanza.

## *The Floure and the Leafe*

	When that Phebus his chaire of gold so hie Had whirled up the sterry sky aloft, And in the Boole was entred certainly; When shoures sweet of raine discended soft,	<i>When the Sun; chariot; high starry Bull (Taurus) showers</i>
5	Causing the ground, fele times and oft, Up for to give many an wholsome aire, And every plaine was clothed faire	<i>many</i>
	With new greene, and maketh small flours To springen here and there in field and in mede —	<i>flowers meadow</i>
10	So very good and wholsome be the shoures That it renueth that was old and deede In winter time, and out of every seede Springeth the hearbe, so that every wight	<i>dead</i>
	Of this season wexeth glad and light.	<i>plant; creature grows</i>
15	And I, so glad of the season swete, Was happed thus upon a certaine night: As I lay in my bed, sleepe ful unmete Was unto me; but why that I ne might	<i>Happened to be in this situation sleep a very remote prospect might not</i>
	Rest, I ne wist, for there nas earthly wight, As I suppose, had more hearts ease	<i>knew not; was not; creature</i>
20	Then I, for I nad sicknesse nor disease.	<i>Than; had not; grief</i>
	Wherefore I mervaile greatly of my selfe, That I so long withouten sleepe lay; And up I rose, three houres after twelfe,	
25	About the springing of the day, And on I put my geare and mine array, And to a pleasaunt grove I gan passe,	<i>did</i>
	Long or the bright sonne up risen was;	<i>before</i>

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- 30      In which were okes great, streight as a line,  
 Under the which the grasse so fresh of hew  
 Was newly spong; and an eight foot or nine  
 Every tree well fro his fellow grew,  
 With braunches brode, lade with leves new,  
 That spongen out ayen the sonne shene,  
 Some very red and some a glad light grene;  
 hue  
 from its  
 broad; laden; leaves  
 toward the bright sun
- 35
- 40      Which as me thought was right a plesaunt sight,  
 And eke the briddes song for to here  
 Would have rejoised any earthly wight.  
 And I, that couth not yet in no manere  
 Heare the nightingale of all the yere,  
 Full busily herkened with hart and with eare  
 If I her voice perceive coud any where.  
 also; hear  
 creature  
 could  
 throughout  
 could
- 45      And at the last a path of litle breade  
 I found, that greatly had not used be,  
 For it forgrownen was with grasse and weede  
 That well unneth a wight might it se.  
 Thought I, this path some whider goth, pard,  
 And so I followed, till it me brought  
 To right a plesaunt herber, well ywrought,  
 breadth  
 been  
 overgrown  
 hardly; see  
 somewhere; by God  
 a very; arbor; made
- 50      That benched was, and with turfes new  
 Freshly turved, whereof the greene gras,  
 So small, so thicke, so short, so fresh of hew,  
 That most like unto green welwet it was.  
 The hegge also, that yede in compas  
 And closed in all the green herbere,  
 With sicamour was set and eglatere,  
 hue  
 velvet  
 went around  
 eglantine
- 55
- 60      Wrethen in fere so wel and cunningly  
 That every branch and leafe grew by mesure,  
 Plain as a bord, of an height, by and by —  
 I see never thing, I you ensure,  
 So wel done; for he that tooke the cure  
 It to make, y trow, did all his peine  
 To make it passe all tho that men have seyne.  
 intertwined together  
 according to a set pattern  
 flat; one; in every detail  
 saw; assure  
 care  
 I believe  
 surpass; those; seen

## *The Floure and the Leafe*

- |    |   |   |
|----|---|---|
| 65 | And shapen was this herber, roofe and all,<br>As a pretty parlour, and also<br>The hegge as thicke as a castel wall,<br>That who that list without to stond or go,<br>Though he would all day prien to and fro,<br>He should not see if there were any wight<br>Within or no; but one within well might                   | whoever; wished<br>peer about<br>person     |
| 70 | Perceive all tho that yeden there without<br>In the field, that was on every side<br>Covered with corne and grasse, that, out of doubt,<br>Though one would seeke all the world wide,<br>So rich a field coud not be espide<br>On no coast, as of the quantity,<br>For of all good thing there was plenty.                | those; went<br>without<br>region; abundance |
| 75 | And I, that all this pleasaunt sight sie,<br>Thought sodainly I felt so sweet an aire<br>Of the eglentere, that certainly<br>There is no heart, I deme, in such dispaire,<br>Ne with thoughts froward and contraire <sup>1</sup><br>So overlaid, but it should soone have bote,<br>If it had ones felt this savour soote. | saw<br>suppose<br>relief<br>once; sweet     |
| 80 | And as I stood and cast aside mine eie,<br>I was ware of the fairest medle tre<br>That ever yet in all my life I sie,<br>As ful of blosomes as it might be.<br>Therein a goldfinch leaping pretile  | eye<br>aware; medlar<br>saw<br>prettily     |
| 85 | From; it pleased him; ate<br>flowers  |   |
| 90 | Fro bough to bough, and as him list he eet,<br>Here and there, of buds and floures sweet.   |   |
| 95 | And to the herber side was joyning<br>This faire tree, of which I have you told.<br>And at the last the brid began to sing,<br>Whan he had eaten what he eat wold,  | bird<br>wanted to eat                       |

<sup>1</sup> *Nor with thoughts unpleasant or disagreeable*

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- So passing sweetly that, by manifold,  
It was more pleasaunt then I coud devise.  
And when his song was ended in this wise,
- 100 The nightingale with so merry a note  
Answered him that all the wood rong,  
So sodainly that, as it were a sote,  
I stood astonied; so was I with the song  
Thorow ravished, that, till late and long,  
I ne wist in what place I was, ne where;  
105 And ayen, me thought, she song even by mine ere.
- Wherefore I waited about busily  
On every side, if I her might see;  
And at the last I gan full well aspy  
Where she sat in a fresh greene laurey tree,  
110 On the further side, even right by me,  
That gave so passing a delicious smell  
According to the eglentere full well.
- 115 Whereof I had so inly great pleasure  
That as me thought I surely ravished was  
Into Paradise, where my desire  
Was for to be, and no ferther passe  
As for that day, and on the sote grasse  
I sat me downe; for, as for mine entent,  
The birds song was more convenient,
- 120 And more pleasaunt to me, by many fold,  
Than meat or drinke, or any other thing.  
Thereto the herber was so fresh and cold,  
The wholsome savours eke so comforting  
That, as I demed, sith the beginning  
125 Of the world was never seen or than  
So pleasant a ground of none earthly man.
- And as I sat, the birds harkening thus,  
Me thought that I heard voices sodainly,
- by far  
than; describe  
manner*
- echoed  
fool  
stunned  
Thoroughly  
knew not  
again; sang*
- looked*
- laurel*
- inwardly*
- sweet  
purpose  
congenial*
- by far  
cool  
also  
supposed; since  
before then  
no*

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- |     |  |  |
|-----|--|--|
| 130 | The most sweetest and most delicious<br>That ever any wight, I trow trewly,<br>Heard in their life, for the armony<br>And sweet accord was in so good musike<br>That the voice to angels most was like.  | <i>creature; believe<br/>harmony<br/>such</i>  |
| 135 | At the last, out of a grove even by,<br>That was right goodly and pleasant to sight,<br>I sie where there came singing lustily<br>A world of ladies; but to tell aright<br>Their great beauty, it lieth not in my might,<br>Ne their array; nevertheless I shall<br>Tell you a part, though I speake not of all. | <i>right<br/>saw</i>   |
| 140 | In surcotes white of velvet wele sitting<br>They were clad, and the semes echone,<br>As it were a maner garnishing,<br>Was set with emerauds, one and one,<br>By and by; but many a rich stone<br>Was set on the purfiles, out of dout,<br>Of colors, sleves, and traines round about,                           | <i>outer garments; fitting<br/>each one of the seams<br/>kind of<br/>one after another<br/>In order<br/>hems<br/>collars</i> |
| 145 | As great pearles, round and orient,<br>Diamonds fine and rubies red,<br>And many another stone, of which I went<br>The names now; and everich on her head<br>A rich fret of gold, which, without dread,<br>Was full of stately rich stones set.<br>And every lady had a chapelet                                 | <i>of supreme excellence<br/>lack<br/>every one<br/>hair-net; doubt<br/>garland</i>  |
| 150 | On her head, of leves fresh and grene,<br>So wele wrought, and so marvelously,<br>That it was a noble sight to sene.<br>Some of laurer, and some ful pleasantly<br>Had chapelets of woodbind, and sadly<br>Some of Agnus castus were also<br>Chapelets fresh. But there were many of tho                         | <i>see<br/>laurel<br/>soberly<br/>[a willow-like plant]; wore</i>  |
| 155 |  |  |
| 160 |  |  |

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- That daunced and eke song ful soberly;  
But all they yede in maner of compace. *also sang  
went in circular formation*
- 165      But one there yede in mid the company  
Soole by her selfe, but all followed the pace *Alone*  
That she kept, whose heavenly figured face  
So pleasaunt was, and her wele-shape person,  
That of beauty she past hem everichon. *surpassed them all*
- 170      And more richly beseeene, by manyfold,  
She was also, in every maner thing;  
On her head, ful pleasaunt to behold,  
A crowne of gold, rich for any king;  
A braunch of Agnus castus eke bearing  
In her hand; and to my sight, trewly,  
175      She lady was of the company. *arranged by far*
- And she began a roundell lustely,  
That *Suse le foyle de vert moy* men call,  
*Seen & mon joly cuer en dormy*. *dance-song  
[see note]*
- 180      And than the company answered all  
With voice sweet entuned and so small,<sup>1</sup>  
That me thought it the sweetest melody  
That ever I heard in my life, soothly. *then  
truly*
- 185      And thus they came, dauncing and singing,  
Into the middes of the mede echone, *meadow each one*  
Before the herber where I was sitting,  
And, God wot, me thought I was wel bigone,  
For than I might avise hem, one by one,  
Who fairest was, who coud best dance or sing,  
Or who most womanly was in all thing. *knows; situated  
study*
- 190      They had not daunced but a little throw *while*  
When that I heard, not fer of, sodainly, *far*  
So great a noise of thundering trumps blow  
As though it should have departed the skie. *split*

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<sup>1</sup> *With voice sweetly modulated, delicately fine, and high-pitched*

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- |     |  |   |
|-----|--|---|
| 195 | And after that, within a while, I sie,<br>From the same grove where the ladies come out,<br>Of men of armes comming such a rout  | <i>saw</i><br><i>large company</i>  |
| 200 | As all the men on earth had ben assembled<br>In that place, wele horsed for the nones,<br>Stering so fast that all the earth trembled.<br>But for to speake of riches and stones,<br>And men and horse, I trow, the large wones<br>Of Pretir John, ne all his tresory,<br>Might not unneth have bought the tenth party.              | <i>been</i><br><i>occasion</i><br><i>Driving on</i><br><i>horses; palace-dwellings</i><br><i>hardly; part</i> |
| 205 | Of their array who-so list heare more,<br>I shal rehearse, so as I can, a lite.<br>Out of the grove that I spake of before<br>I sie come first, all in their clokkes white,<br>A company that were for their delite<br>Chapelets fresh of okes seriall<br>Newly sprong, and trumpets they were all.                                  | <i>wishes</i><br><i>little</i><br><i>wore</i><br><i>evergreen oaks</i><br><i>trumpeters</i>                   |
| 210 | On every trumpe hanging a broad banere<br>Of fine tartarium, were ful richely bete — <sup>1</sup><br>Every trumpet his lords armes bere;<br>About their necks, with great pearles set,<br>Colers brode; for cost they would not lete,<br>As it would seeme, for their scochones echone<br>Were set about with many a precious stone. | <i>trumpeter</i><br><i>Collars; spare</i><br><i>coats of arms</i>   |
| 215 | Their horse harneis was all white also.<br>And after them next, in one company,<br>Came nine kings of armes, and no mo,<br>In clokkes of white cloth of gold, richly,<br>Chapelets of greene on their heads on hye.<br>The crowns that they on their scochones bere<br>Were set with pearle, ruby, and saphere,                      | <i>royal heralds; more</i><br><i>high</i><br><i>bore</i>  |

<sup>1</sup> Of delicate silk cloth (from Tartary) that was exquisitely embroidered

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225	And eke great diamonds many one; But all their horse harneis and other geare Was in a sute according, everichone, As ye have heard the foresaid trumpets were. And by seeming they were nothing to lere — <sup>1</sup>	<i>many a one</i> <i>matching kind</i>
230	And there guiding they did so manerly. And after hem cam a great company	<i>their; properly</i> <i>them</i>
235	Of herauds and pursevaunts eke Arraied in clothes of white velvet; And hardily, they were no thing to seke <sup>2</sup> How they on hem should the harneis set; And every man had on a chapelet.	<i>junior heralds</i> <i>them</i>
	Scochones and eke horse harneis, in-dede, They had in sute of hem that before hem yede.	<i>Coats of arms</i> <i>matching them</i>
240	Next after hem came in armour bright, All save their heads, seemely knights nine; And every claspe and naile, as to my sight, Of their harneis were of red gold fine; With cloth of gold and furred with ermine	
245	Were the trappours of their stedes strong, Wide and large, that to the ground did hong.	<i>trappings</i> <i>hang</i>
250	And every boose of bridle and paitrell <sup>3</sup> That they had was worth, as I would wene, A thousand pound; and on their heads, well Dressed, were crownes of laurer grene, The best made that ever I had sene.	<i>think</i>
	And every knight had after him riding Three hensh-men, on him awaiting;	<i>mounted squires</i>
	Of which ever the on on a short tronchoun His lords helme bare, so richly dight	<i>the first; staff</i> <i>decorated</i>

<sup>1</sup> *And as it appeared, they had nothing to learn*

<sup>2</sup> *And certainly, they had no need to go and find out*

<sup>3</sup> *And every boss (stud) of the breast-piece of horse armor*

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- 255 That the worst was worth the raunsoun  
 Of a king; the second a shield bright  
 Bare at his neck; the thred bare upright  
 A mighty spheare, ful sharpe ground and kene.  
 And every child ware, of leaves grene,  
spear; whetted; sharp  
 young man
- 260 A fresh chapelet upon his haires bright;  
 And clokes white of fine veluet they were;  
 Their steeds trapped and raied right  
 Without difference, as their lords were.  
 And after hem, on many a fresh corsere,  
wore  
 arrayed entirely
- 265 There came of armed knights such a rout  
 That they besprad the large field about.  
charger  
 large company
- And all they were, after their degrees,  
 Chapelets new, made of laurer grene,  
 Some of oke, and some of other trees.  
 Some in their honds bare boughes shene,  
 Some of laurer, and some of okes kene,  
 Some of hauthorne, and some of woodbind,  
 And many mo which I had not in mind.  
wore; ranks  
 bright  
 noble  
 more
- 270 And so they came, their horse freshly stering  
 With bloody sownes of their trompes loud.  
 There sie I many an uncouth disguising  
 In the array of these knights proud.  
 And at the last, as evenly as they coud,  
 They took their places in middes of the mede,  
 And every knight turned his horse hede  
horses; urging on  
 blood-curdling sounds  
 unfamiliar mode of dressing
- 275 To his fellow, and lightly laid a speare  
 In the rest, and so justes began  
 On every part about, here and there.  
 Some brake his spere, some drew down hors and man;  
 About the field astray the steeds ran;  
 And to behold their rule and governaunce,  
 I you ensure, it was a great pleasaunce.  
in as regular a formation  
 meadow  
 socket for couching spear; jousts  
 discipline; conduct  
 assure

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- |     |  |   |
|-----|--|---|
| 290 | And so the justes last an houre and more;<br>But tho that crowned were in laurer grene<br>Wan the prise — their dints were so sore<br>That there was none ayenst hem might sustene.<br>And the justing all was left of clene,<br>And fro their horse the nine alight anon,<br>And so did all the remnant everichon.      | <i>those<br/>Won; prize; blows<br/>against; endure<br/>off entirely</i>           |
| 295 | And forth they yede togider, twain and twain,<br>That to behold it was a worthy sight,<br>Toward the ladies on the green plain,<br>That song and daunced, as I said now right.<br>The ladies, as soone as they goodly might,<br>They brake of both the song and dance,<br>And yede to meet hem with full glad semblance. | <i>together<br/>just now<br/>decorously<br/>off<br/>looks</i>                     |
| 300 | And every lady tooke ful womanly<br>By the hond a knight, and forth they yede<br>Unto a faire laurer that stood fast by,<br>With leves lade, the boughes of great brede;<br>And to my dome there never was indede<br>Man that had seen halfe so faire a tre;<br>For underneath there might it wel have be                | <i>hand; went<br/>laden; breadth<br/>in my opinion<br/>Anyone<br/>been</i>        |
| 305 | An hundred persons at their own plesance,<br>Shadowed fro the heat of Phebus bright,<br>So that they should have felt no grevance<br>Of raine ne haile, that hem hurt might.<br>The savour eke rejoice would any wight<br>That had be sickle or melancolius,<br>It was so very good and vertuous.                        | <i>full of healing power</i>  |
| 310 | And with great reverence they enclining low<br>To the tree, so soot and faire of hew;<br>And after that, within a little throw,<br>They began to sing and daunce of new;<br>Some song of love, some plaining of untrew,<br>Environing the tree that stood upright,<br>And ever yede a lady and a knight.                 | <i>sweet<br/>while<br/>anew<br/>sang; complaining; infidelity<br/>Surrounding</i> |
| 315 |  |   |

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- And at the last I cast mine eie aside,  
And was ware of a lusty company  
That came roming out of the field wide,  
Hond in hond, a knight and a lady;  
The ladies all in surcotes, that richely  
Purfiled were with many a rich stone;  
And every knight of greene ware mantels on,
- aware; vigorous company  
*outer garments*  
*Ornamented at the hem*  
*had on (wore)*
- 330 Embrouded well, so as the surcotes were.  
And everich had a chapelet on her hed,  
Which did right well upon the shining here,  
Made of goodly floures, white and red.  
The knights eke, that they in hond led,  
In sute of hem ware chapelets everichone.  
And before hem went minstrels many one,
- Embroidered*  
*looked; hair*  
*wore matching*
- As harpes, pipes, lutes, and sautry,  
All in greene; and on their heads bare,  
Of divers floures, made full craftely,  
340 All in a sute, goodly chapelets they ware.  
And so dauncing into the mede they fare,  
In mid the which they found a tuft that was  
All oversprad with floures in compas.
- psaltery (small harp)*  
*bare*  
*matching; wore*  
*80*  
*all around*
- Whereto they inclined everichon  
345 With great reverence, and that full humbly.  
And at the last there began anon  
A lady for to sing right womanly  
A bargaret in praising the daisie;  
For, as me thought, among her notes swete  
350 She said *Si douce est la Margarete.*
- pastoral song in praise [of]*
- Then they all answered her in fere  
So passingly well and so pleasauntly  
That it was a blisful noise to here.  
But I not how, it happed sodainly,  
355 As about noone, the sonne so fervently  
Waxe whote that the prety tender floures  
Had lost the beauty of her fresh coloures,
- in unison*  
*know not*  
*hot*  
*their*

### *The Floure and the Leafe*

- |     |  |  |
|-----|--|--|
| 360 | Forshronke with heat; the ladies eke tobrent,<br>That they ne wist where they hem might bestow.<br>The knights swelt, for lack of shade nie shent.<br>And after that, within a little throw,<br>The wind began so sturdily to blow<br>That down goeth all the floures everichone<br>So that in all the mede ther laft not one, | <i>All shrivelled up; scorched<br/>knew not<br/>fainted; nearly exhausted<br/>while<br/>was left</i> |
| 365 | Save such as succoured were among the leves<br>Fro every storme that might hem assaile,<br>Growing under hegges and thicke greves.<br>And after that there came a storme of haile<br>And raine in feare, so that, withouten faile,<br>The ladies ne the knights nade o threed<br>Dry on them, so dropping was her weed.        | <i>bushes<br/>together<br/>had not; one single<br/>dripping wet; their clothing</i>                  |
| 370 | And whan the storm was cleane passed away,<br>Tho in white, that stood under the tre —<br>They felt nothing of the great affray<br>That they in greene without had in ybe —<br>To them they yede for routh and pite,<br>Them to comfort after their great disease,<br>So faine they were the helppesse for to ease.            | <i>Those<br/>tempest<br/>been<br/>went; pity (ruth)<br/>discomfort<br/>eager</i>                     |
| 375 | Then I was ware how one of hem in grene<br>Had on a crown, rich and well sitting,<br>Wherefore I demed wel she was a quene,<br>And tho in greene on her were awaiting.<br>The ladies then in white that were coming<br>Toward them, and the knights in fere,<br>Began to comfort hem and make hem chere.                       |  |
| 380 | The queen in white, that was of great beauty,<br>Tooke by the hond the queen that was in grene<br>And said, 'Suster, I have right great pity<br>Of your annoy, and of the troublous tene<br>Wherein ye and your company have bene<br>So long, alas! and if that it you please<br>To go with me, I shall do you the ease        |  |
| 385 |  | <i>distress; distress</i>  |
| 390 |  |  |

*The Floure and the Leafe*

- |     |   |  |
|-----|---|--|
| 395 | In all the pleasure that I can or may.<br>Whereof the tother, humbly as she might,<br>Thanked her; for in right ill array<br>She was with storm and heat, I you behight.<br>And every lady then, anon right,<br>That were in white, one of them took in grene<br>By the hond; which when the knights had sene,              | <i>other</i><br><i>promise</i><br><i>straightaway</i>                            |
| 400 | In like wise ech of them took a knight<br>Clad in grene, and forth with hem they fare<br>To an hegge, where they, anon right,<br>To make their justs they would not spare<br>Boughes to hew downe and eke trees square,<br>Wherwith they made hem stately fires great<br>To dry their clothes that were wringing weat.      | <i>each</i><br><i>go</i><br><i>jousts</i><br><i>stout</i><br><i>wet</i>          |
| 405 | And after that, of hearbs that there grew,<br>They made, for blisters of the sonne brenning,<br>Very good and wholsome ointments new,<br>Where that they yede the sick fast annoiting.<br>And after that they yede about gadering<br>Pleasant salades, which they made hem eat<br>For to refresh their great unkindly heat. | <i>burning</i><br><i>Wherever; busily</i><br><i>salad herbs</i>                  |
| 410 | The lady of the Leafe then began to pray<br>Her of the Floure (for to my seeming<br>They should be, as by their array)<br>To soupe with her, and eke, for any thing,<br>That she should with her all her people bring.<br>And she ayen, in right goodly manere,<br>Thanketh her of her most friendly cheare,                | <i>it seems to me</i><br><i>dine; by all means</i>                               |
| 415 | Saying plainly that she would obey<br>With all her hart all her commaundement.<br>And then anon, without lenger delay,<br>The lady of the Leafe hath one ysent<br>For a palfrey, after her intent,<br>Araied well and faire in harneis of gold,<br>For nothing lacked that to him long should.                              | <i>longer</i><br><i>sent</i><br><i>palfrey; in pursuance of</i><br><i>belong</i> |
| 420 |   |  |
| 425 |   |  |

*The Floure and the Leafe*

- 430 And after that, to all her company  
 She made to purvey horse and every thing  
 That they needed; and then, full lustily,  
 Even by the herber where I was sitting,  
 They passed all, so pleasantly singing  
 That it would have comforted any wight.  
 But then I sie a passing wonder sight: *wondrous*
- 435 For then the nightingale, that all the day  
 Had in the laurer sete and did her might  
 The whol service to sing longing to May,  
 All sodainly gan to take her flight,  
 And to the lady of the Leafe forthright  
 440 She flew, and set her on her hond softly,  
 Which was a thing I marveled of greatly.
- 445 The goldfinch eke, that fro the medill tre  
 Was fled for heat into the bushes cold,  
 Unto the lady of the Flower gan fle,  
 And on hir hond he set him, as he wold,  
 And pleasantly his wings gan to fold;  
 And for to sing they pained hem both as sore  
 As they had do of all the day before. *medlar*  
*cool*  
*fly*  
*done*
- 450 And so these ladies rode forth a great pace,  
 And all the rout of knights eke in fere.  
 And I, that had sene all this wonder case,  
 Thought I would assay, in some manere,  
 To know fully the trouth of this matere,  
 And what they were that rode so pleasantly.  
 455 And when they were the herber passed by
- 460 I drest me forth, and happed to mete anon  
 Right a faire lady, I you ensure;  
 And she come riding by hir selfe alone,  
 All in white, with semblance ful demure.  
 I saluted her, and bad her good aventure  
 Must her befall, as I coud most humbly,  
 And she answered, 'My doughter, gramercy.' *stepped; happened*  
*A very*  
*came*  
*looks*  
*greeted; fortune*  
*Might*  
*many thanks*

*The Floure and the Leafe*

- ‘Madam,’ quod I, ‘if that I durst enquere  
Of you, I would faine, of that company,  
Wit what they be that past by this arbere?’  
And she ayen answered right friendly:  
‘My faire doughter, all tho that passed hereby  
In white clothing, be servants everichone  
Unto the Leafe, and I my selfe am one.
- 465
- 470 Se ye not her that crowned is,’ quod she,  
‘All in white?’ ‘Madame,’ quod I, ‘yis.’  
‘That is Diane, goddes of chastity;  
And for bicause that she a maiden is,  
In her hond the braunch she bereth, this  
475 That Agnus castus men call properly.  
And all the ladies in her company
- Which ye se of that hearb chaplets weare  
Be such as han kepte alway her maidenhede.  
And all they that of laurer chaplets beare  
480 Be such as hardy were and wan by deed  
Victorius name which never may be dede;  
And all they were so worthy of ther hond,  
In hir time, that none might hem withstand.
- 485 And tho that weare chapelets on ther hede  
Of fresh woodbind, be such as never were  
To love untrue in word, thought, ne dede,  
But aye stedfast; ne for pleasance, ne fere,  
Thogh that they shuld their harts all to-tere,  
Would never flit, but ever were stedfast,  
490 Till that their lives there asunder brast.’
- ‘Now, faire madame,’ quod I, ‘yet I would pray  
Your ladiship, if that it might be,  
That I might know, by some maner way —  
Sith that it hath liked your beaute  
495 The trouth of these ladies for to tell me —  
What that these knights be, in rich armour,  
And what tho be in grene, and weare the flour,
- enquire  
gladly  
Know
- yes
- (see note l. 160)
- have
- won  
dead
- their
- head
- deed
- fear
- tear to pieces
- waver
- burst
- pleased

*The Floure and the Leafe*

- And why that some did reverence to the tre  
And some unto the plot of floures faire?'  
500 'With right good will, my fair doghter,' quod she,  
'Sith youre desire is good and debonaire.  
Tho nine crowned be very exemplaire  
Of all honour longing to chivalry,  
And those, certaine, be called the Nine Worthy,  
*courteous*  
*model*  
*appertaining*
- 505 Which ye may se riding all before,  
That in her time did many a noble dede,  
And for their worthines ful oft have bore  
The crowne of laurer leaves on their hede,  
As ye may in your old bookees rede;  
510 And how that he that was a conquerour  
Had by laurer alway his most honour.  
*their*
- And tho that beare bowes in their hond  
Of the precious laurer so notable,  
Be such as were, I woll ye understand,  
515 Noble knights of the Round Table,  
And eke the Douseperis honourable;  
Which they beare in signe of victory —  
It is witnes of their dedes mightily.  
*boughs*  
*want (to)*  
*That which*
- Eke there be knights old of the Garter,  
520 That in her time did right worthily;  
And the honour they did to the laurer  
Is for thereby they have their laud wholly,  
Their triumph eke and marshall glory;  
525 Which unto them is more parfit riches  
Then any wight imagine can or gesse.  
*praise*  
*marital*  
*perfect*  
*Than*
- For one leafe given of that noble tre  
To any wight that hath done worthily,  
And it be done so as it ought to be,  
Is more honour then any thing earthly.  
530 Witnes of Rome that founder was, truly,  
Of all knighthood and deeds marvelous —  
Record I take of Titus Livius.  
*If*  
*[him] of Rome*

*The Floure and the Leafe*

- And as for her that crowned is in greene, *her in green that is crowned*  
It is Flora, of these floures goddesse.
- 535 And all that here on her awaiting beene,  
It are such that loved idlenes  
And not delite of no busines  
But for to hunt and hauke, and pley in medes,  
And many other such idle dedes.
- 540 And for the great delite and pleasaunce  
They have to the floure, and so reverently  
They unto it do such obeisaunce,  
As ye may se.' 'Now, faire madame,' quod I,  
'If I durst aske what is the cause and why
- 545 That knights have the signe of honour  
Rather by the leafe than by the floure?'
- 'Sothly, doughter,' quod shee, 'this is the trouth:  
For knights ever should be persevering  
To seeke honour without feintise or slouth, *Truly*  
550 Fro wele to better, in all maner thing;  
In signe of which, with leaves aye lasting  
They be rewarded after their degree, *deceit*  
Whose lusty green May may not appaired be, *according to their rank*  
But aye keping their beauty fresh and greene, *vigorous; impaired*  
555 For there nis storme that may hem deface,  
Haile nor snow, wind nor frosts kene;  
Wherfore they have this propertie and grace.  
And for the floure within a little space  
Woll be lost, so simple of nature
- 560 They be, that they no greevance may endure,  
And every storme will blow them soone away,  
Ne they last not but for a season —  
That is the cause, the very trouth to say,  
That they may not, by no way of reason,
- 565 Be put to no such occupacion.' *function (use)*  
'Madame,' quod I, 'with all mine whole servise  
I thanke you now, in my most humble wise;

*The Floure and the Leafe*

- For now I am ascertained throughly  
Of every thing I desired to know.' *apprised*
- 570 'I am right glad that I have said, sothly,  
Ought to your pleasure, if ye will me trow,' *truly*  
Quod she ayen, 'but to whome doe ye owe  
Your service? and which woll ye honour,  
Tell me, I pray, this yeere, the Leafe or the Flour?' *believe*
- 575 'Madame,' quod I, 'though I least worthy,  
Unto the Leafe I owe mine observaunce.'  
'That is,' quod she, 'right well done, certainly,  
And I pray God to honour you avaunce, *advance you to honor*  
And kepe you fro the wicked remembraunce
- 580 Of Male Bouch, and all his crueltie; *Slander*  
And all that good and well-condicioned be. *And [so with]; of good disposition*
- For here may I no lenger now abide;  
I must follow the great company  
That ye may see yonder before you ride.'
- 585 And forth, as I couth, most humbly, *forthwith*  
I tooke my leve of her as she gan hie *hasten*  
After them, as fast as ever she might.  
And I drow homeward, for it was nigh night, *drew*
- 590 And put all that I had seen in writing,  
Under support of them that lust it to rede. *In the hope of support; desire*
- O little booke, thou art so unconning, *ignorant*  
How darst thou put thy self in prees for drede? *[the] throng*
- It is wonder that thou wexest not rede, *red*  
Sith that thou wost ful lite who shall behold *knowest*
- 595 Thy rude language, full boistously unfold. *rough; set forth in homely fashion*

EXPLICIT

### Notes

- 1–14 The spring opening was conventional in courtly love-allegory, as a way of suggesting the renewal of love and love's expectation, or the unhappiness by contrast of unrequited love (both suggestions are explicitly denied here, in lines 18–21).
- 1–3 Astronomical allusion as a way of indicating the season was equally conventional. The opening lines of the General Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* are the best-known example. These lines are directly imitated from the closing lines of The Squire's Tale ('Apollo whirleth up his chaar so hye', V.671). Readers of poems like *FL* would be familiar from the Calendars in their Books of Hours with pictures of Phoebus passing across a starry sky in his golden chariot; the reference of course is not to the rising of the sun but to its northward course through the zodiac and its entry into Taurus (on April 12, in Chaucer's time).
- 8 *maketh*: It is difficult to find a subject for this verb, but loose and diffused syntax of this kind is not uncommon among those who tried to imitate Chaucer's consummate mastery of the long verse sentence (e.g., General Prologue, 1–18).
- 18–21 The narrator seems aware of the usual cause of sleeplessness, in love-longing and love-sickness, as in Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess*.
- 27–126 The description of the garden is full of echoes of Chaucer, Lydgate, and the French poets. Like the Prologue to the *The Legend of Good Women*, it is meant to be recognized as a tapestry of literary allusion (rather than a description of a 'real' garden).
- 34 The sun seems to have risen very suddenly (cf. 28); consistency of realistic visualization is not in general much sought after in these descriptions.

### Notes

- 35 *Some very red*: this, on the other hand, is a piece of precisely observed botanical detail.
- 40 *nightingale*: it was thought a good omen, foretelling success in love, to hear the nightingale before the cuckoo upon the advent of both with spring.
- 49 *herber*: The enclosed arbor was a favorite feature of medieval gardens, real and literary; lovers discourse there privately, and poets fall asleep. This poet, for a change, does not fall asleep, and the arbor exists as a vantage-point from which to view operations *outside*.
- 50 *benched*: earthen benches topped with turf were very popular in medieval gardens (as in the Prologue to the *The Legend of Good Women*).
- 78–84 The sweet scents of gardens are much emphasized; they were not only pleasant in themselves, but were believed to have healing power.
- 86 *medle*: The medlar tree is stunted and has low-hanging branches; the fruit is small, hard and round, and fit to eat only when decaying, when it turns brown (its popular name was ‘open-ers’; see Chaucer, *The Reeve’s Tale*, I.3871).
- 141 *surcotes*: sleeveless over-garments, often richly embroidered and decorated, worn over a lighter under-garment. In the fifteenth century the arm-openings became so exaggeratedly large that the top became almost like a pinafore.
- 142 *semes*: In the richest clothes, ornamental strips of material, sometimes studded with precious stones, were inserted or laid over the seams.
- 160 *Agnus castus*: a willow-like plant, emblematic of chastity.
- 176 *roundell*: a dance-song, led by a soloist, at the head of a chain or in the middle of a circle (as here), the soloist singing the verses of the song and the chorus repeating part of the verse as a refrain.
- 177–78 Popular songs were often quoted in courtly poems to give an air of freshness and topicality. The lines quoted here are a garbled version of the opening of a fifteenth-century song from Normandy: ‘Dessoubz la branche d’ung

### *The Floure and the Leafe*

verd moy, / S'est mon jolli cuer endormy' (Beneath the branch of a green May-tree / My joyful heart has gone to sleep). It is the song of a woman, describing how she is waiting for her lover, and affirming the constancy of her love.

- 202 *Pretir John*: Prester John, the fabulously wealthy legendary Christian monarch ('Prester' is from the same root as 'priest'), first associated with Asia, later with Ethiopia.
- 209 *okes serial*: directly imitated from The Knight's Tale, I.2290, where Emelye wears a 'coroune of a grene ook cereal' as an emblem of her service to Diana. The association intended is clearly with the evergreen or holm-oak (*ilex*), though the original reference in Boccaccio's *Teseide* (which Chaucer follows), is to the deciduous Turkey oak.
- 220 *kings of armes*: heralds in royal employ. Here, there is one in attendance on each of the Nine Worthy (see 240).
- 233 *veluet*: trisyllabic here, as in Chaucer.
- 271 *kene*: 'noble, brave'; by hypallage, the epithet appropriate to those who bear the oak is transferred to the oak itself.
- 285 *steeds*: i.e., the riderless horses.
- 316 *enclining*: One expects a finite verb, but this rather loose use of participles is common in fifteenth-century poetry (cf. 320 below; 8 above).
- 329 *greene*: The symbolism of white (for purity), worn by the company of the leaf, was clear enough; green was commonly associated with, among other things, fickleness in love and frivolity, as in Chaucer's poem *Against Women Unconstant* ('In stede of blew, thus may ye were al grene').
- 331–33 These lines refer to the women in the company.
- 348 *bargaret*: from French *bergerette*, a shepherd's song, which gave its name to a fixed-form court-song in the fifteenth century. The praise of the daisy is a

### Notes

convention in the French poetry of the fourteenth century and in Chaucer's Prologue to his *The Legend of Good Women*.

- 350     *Si douce*, etc.: 'So sweet is the daisy.' Probably the refrain of a popular song (cf. 177–78).
- 356     *whote*: a spelling indicative of the development of a strong rounded on-glide before *ho* (with long vowel), as in *whole*, *whore*, where the spelling survives.
- 403     *to make their justs*: It sounds as if they plan to joust with them afterwards, but this seems unlikely. The line may be corrupt.
- 407     *hearbs*: The botanical part of the natural history in the Middle Ages was largely the study of the medicinal properties of plants. Everyone would have known what plants to gather to make a sunburn lotion.
- 412     *salades*: Parsley and lettuce, specifically, are recommended for those who are over-heated (lettuce, incidentally, was also thought to be an antiaphrodisiac).
- 425     *palfray*: A palfray would be a saddle-horse for ordinary riding, especially suitable for ladies.
- 437     *service*: The idea that the song of the birds in spring was a 'service' in honor of God, or Nature, or Love, was a popular conceit with medieval poets, characteristic of the way religious language was appropriated to the celebration of love.
- 456     *happed*: Such 'chance' meetings are common in allegorical poetry, where some kind of fictional guide is needed to explain the significance of what has been happening.
- 471     *yis*: 'yes'; was originally, as here, the emphatic form of *ye* or *yea*, and used to answer questions in a negative form.
- 504     The *Nine Worthy* (properly so, not 'the Nine Worthies') appear frequently in late medieval literature and art as types of nobility, illustrious examples for

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the present, and, in the *Ubi sunt* ('Where are ... ?) topos, as examples of the power of death. They were, traditionally, three Jews (Joshua, David, Judas Maccabeus), three pagans (Hector, Alexander, Julius Caesar), and three Christians (Arthur, Charlemagne, Godfrey of Boulogne). Their presence here may seem odd, but the Middle Ages had little difficulty in imaging forth the past in terms of idealized contemporary chivalry. Julius Caesar, indeed, is seen as the founder of medieval chivalry (see 530–32 below).

- 516 *Douseperis*: *Les douze pers*, the twelve peers of France, were Charlemagne's paladins (Roland, Oliver, etc.), who fought with him against the Saracens.
- 519 *Garter*: The Order of the Garter was established by Edward III in 1349.
- 530 The reference is to Julius Caesar, who was much venerated in the Middle Ages, and credited with the founding of chivalry.
- 532 *Titus Livius*: Livy (59 BC – AD 17) is not renowned as a historian of Caesar, but he is an unimpeachable historical authority, which is the reason he is alluded to here.
- 536 *idlenes*: for moralists, the 'mother of all vices'; she is also, it is worth remembering, the portress of the Garden of Love in the *Roman de la Rose*.
- 541 *and*: this word upsets the grammar of the sentence, to modern taste, but such sentences are not uncommon in fifteenth-century poetry.
- 550 *For wele to better*: an echo, perhaps, of the idiom of the French motto, *De bien en mieulx*. Cf. *De mieulx en mieulx*, used as a motto in the fifteenth century by the Paston family of Norfolk.
- 554 *keping*: another loosely related participle.
- 565 *no such occupacion*: i.e., no such occupation (function) as to symbolize perseverance and fidelity.
- 574 *this yeere*: refers to *honour*, of course, not *tell*. In the courtly cult of the Flower and the Leaf, the choice was made on the first of May and was binding for the ensuing year.

*Notes*

- 580      *Male Bouch*: ‘Wicked Tongue,’ or Slander, a personification in the *Roman de la Rose* (called ‘Wykked-Tonge’ in Chaucer’s translation, 3027).
- 591–95    A good example of the ‘modesty epilogue,’ which Lydgate, in particular, develops in an immodestly elaborate way. The ‘little book’ is probably an echo of Chaucer’s *Troilus* V.1786. The characterization of the little book as blushing at its own boldness is an unusual and effective touch.



## ***The Assembly of Ladies***

### ***Introduction***

There are three manuscripts of *The Assembly of Ladies* (AL), all dating from the last quarter of the fifteenth century: British Library MS Addit.34360, Trinity College, Cambridge, MS R.3.19, and Longleat House MS 258. The earliest and best of these, copied not long after the poem was written (c. 1470–80), is MS Addit.34360, which is used as the basis of the standard modern edition of the poem (Pearsall 1962). Pearsall's text is followed here, with his emendations silently incorporated. There is also an early print of the poem in the collected edition of Chaucer's Works put together by William Thynne in 1532. Thynne's text, which is close to that of the Longleat MS, was used by Skeat as the basis for his edition of AL in *Chaucerian and Other Pieces* (1897), but solely for reasons of convenience: it has no authority. Thynne included the poem because of his desire to include all plausibly Chaucerian pieces that he could find, and it stayed in the canon until rejected by Thomas Tyrwhitt in his 'Account of the Works of Chaucer' in his great edition of the *Canterbury Tales* (1775–78). AL came to be closely associated with *FL* (which was also once in Longleat 258) because Skeat supposed that, since both had a female narrator, both must be by women, and, for economy's sake, by the same woman. Whatever the grounds for the attribution of the two poems to women, there are no grounds whatsoever for the attribution of both to the same author: the briefest acquaintance with the two poems will make clear the difference between the radiant and eccentric gifts of the author of *FL* and the skillful hack-work of *AL*. Style, language, and meter are all against common authorship.

The theme of *AL* is the truth and loyalty of women and, generally speaking, the neglect and unfaithfulness of men. It describes an assembly at which a group of five ladies (including the narrator) and four gentlewomen present their written complaints against men at the court of Lady Loyalty and seek redress (though exactly what form that might take remains a mystery). One of the gentlewomen seems to be there under false pretenses, since her petition (673–79) says she has nothing to complain about. The preparations for attending the assembly, the ar-

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rangements when the ladies arrive, and the organization of their presentation of their 'bills,' occupy the greater part of the poem.

The theme of the poem is a conventional one in the love poetry of the period, and bears the same relation to reality as the opposed theme of women's lasciviousness and fickleness. The paintings of women unfortunate in love in Lady Loyalty's palace (456–66) remind us of similar paintings in the temples of the *The Parliament of Fowls* and Lydgate's *Temple of Glass*, but more especially of the stories of faithful women wronged by men in Chaucer's martyrology of Cupid's saints, *The Legend of Good Women*. Chaucer represents himself, not entirely seriously, as doing penance for having slandered women in *Troilus and Criseyde*; the writings of Christine de Pisan are a good deal less playful, and her *Epistre au Dieu d'Amours* is a vehement defence of the honor and fidelity of women, particularly against the slanders of Ovid and of Jean de Meun in the *Roman de la Rose*. The debate, with its own painful basis in reality and yet no doubt productive of much lively casuistry on relaxed social occasions, continued through the fifteenth century in the controversy provoked or supposedly provoked by Alain Chartier's portrayal of the cruel mistress in *La Belle Dame sans Merci*. At the same time, it should be remembered that the theme of women wronged, oppressed, or unfortunate in love produces some of the most affecting poetry of the period, not only in Chaucer, but also, and perhaps more notably, in Gower.

The framework chosen for the development of the theme is that of the Court of Love, conceived of here both as the quasi-religious court of Lady Loyalty, where she hears petitions and grants boons, and as a court of law, with set procedure and forms of legal redress (see 325n). There are many precedents for both conventions, particularly in poems of the fifteenth century such as Lydgate's *Temple of Glass*, which is an important influence throughout *AL*; one recalls too the establishment of a *Cour Amoureuse* by the Duke of Burgundy on St. Valentine's Day, 1401, dedicated to the virtues of humility and fidelity and to the service of ladies, in whom those virtues are so conspicuous. The *complaintes d'amour* for which such assemblies provided the occasion are themselves a favorite literary genre, exploited, it must be said, more than fully in *AL*. The allegory of the assembly is enclosed within the conventional framework of a dream, which springs naturally from the circumstances of the narrator: unhappy in love, she dreams of the court of Lady Loyalty, where the wrongs of despised lovers will be set right.

The allegory of *AL* has little vitality, and it was an error of judgment on the poet's part to suppose that interest could be sustained through nine separate and generally similar petitions of complaint summarily presented (582–707). If the ladies and their mottoes were once excitingly identifiable in real life and had

### *Introduction*

some topical significance in the ‘game of love’ (for which see Stevens, *Music and Poetry*), things might be different, but, whatever that significance might have been, it is now lost. The author’s principal interest, as C. S. Lewis discerned, appears to be in ‘the stir and bustle of an actual court, the whispered conversations, the putting on of clothes, and the important comings and goings’ (*Allegory of Love*, p. 250). Here, in a manner reminiscent of Skelton, the dialogue has a vivid colloquial vigor, and the narrator’s pert self-confidence comes over quite sharply, as in the somewhat petulant response to the request for her bill (682, 690), and in the skillfully circumspect and maybe unnecessarily suspicious way she deals with the request by Perseveraunce for privileged advance information about the ladies’ mottoes (400–13). The interest in the actual running of a great household, and what may seem to a modern reader an inordinate care to name and specify the functions of all the officers, show, and are designed to show, a fair expertise; it was an interest shared by the scribes of the Longleat and Trinity manuscripts, who both rubricate appropriate stanza headings with the names of officers. In its concern for the topical and actual, *AL* stands in sharp contrast to *FL*, reflecting contemporary social life and the appurtenances of that life with a directness absent from the latter poem. There may be some specific influence from the Burgundian styles made fashionable during the later reign of Edward IV (1471–83).

Whether the author was indeed a woman is a question impossible to prove either way. There is nothing very unusual in the writing of poetry by women in the fifteenth century, nor in the adoption of a female persona by male poets. The carefully guarded language in which the exclusion of men from the assembly is first announced (145–54) suggests a certain sensitivity on the matter, as does the almost total absence (though see 669) of any mention, in the actual complaints, of men or of the fact that men are the cause of all the trouble. The language, in fact, is so vague and unspecific that one could not be sure exactly what the ladies are complaining about if one did not already know. The constant references to clothes, and the putting on and wearing of clothes, and the comments on the way the clothes look (e.g., 256), suggests a woman’s interests, though they may equally well be what a man would characterize as a woman’s interests. But the monotonously regular nature of the versification, the rather threadbare repertoire of tags and conventional phrases, suggest a hack versifier, and if this versifier is also responsible for the romance of *Generydes*, as seems to me certain, it is very unlikely that it is a woman. Women had occasion and good reason to write in the fifteenth century, but not like this.

### *The Assembly of Ladies*

- In Septembre, at fallyng of the leef,  
The fressh season was al to-gydre done  
And of the corn was gadred in the sheef;  
In a gardyn, abowte tweyne after none,  
5 There were ladyes walkyng, as was ther wone,  
Foure in nombre, as to my mynde doth falle,  
And I the fist, symplest of alle.
- Of gentil wymmen foure ther were also,  
Disportyng hem everiche after theyr guyse,  
10 In crosse aleys walkyng be two and two,  
And som alone after theyr fantasyes.  
Thus occupied we were in dyvers wise,  
And yit in trouth we were nat alone:  
Theyr were knyghtis and squyers many one.
- 15 Whereof I serve? on of hem asked me.  
I seyde ageyne, as it fil in my thought:  
'To walke aboute the mase, in certeynte,  
As a womman that nothyng rought.'  
He asked me ageyn whom I sought  
20 And of my coloure why I was so pale.  
'Forsoth,' quod I, 'and therby lith a tale.'
- 'That must me wite,' quod he, 'and that anon;  
Telle on, late se, and make no taryeng.'  
'Abide,' quod I, 'ye be an hasti one;  
25 I let yow wite it is no litle thyng;  
But for because ye have a grete longyng  
In yowre desire this procese for to here  
I shal yow telle the playne of this matiere.
- altogether  
gathered  
two in the afternoon  
custom  
come  
  
themselves each; fashion  
according to their fancies  
various ways  
yet  
many a one  
  
What am I doing here?  
in reply; came  
maze  
had no cares  
  
said; lies  
  
I know; straightway  
let me see; delay  
know  
hear  
full truth

*The Assembly of Ladies*

	It happed thus that in an afternone My felawship and I, bi one assent, Whan al oure other busynesse was done, To passe oure tyme in to this mase we went And toke oure weyes yche aftyr other entent: <sup>1</sup> Som went inward and went they had gon oute, Som stode amyddis and loked al aboute;	<i>happened</i> <i>maze</i> <i>and thought in the middle</i>
30	And soth to sey som were ful fer behynde And right anon as ferforth as the best; Other there were, so mased in theyr mynde, Al weys were goode for hem, both est and west. 40 Thus went they furth and had but litel rest, And som theyr corage dide theym so assaile For verray wrath they stept over the rayle.	<i>to tell the truth; far far forward bewildered ways; them</i> <i>impetuous spirit</i>
45	And as they sought hem self thus to and fro <sup>2</sup> I gate my self a litel avauntage; Al for-weryed, I myght no further go, Though I had wonne right grete for my viage; So come I forth into a streyte passage, Whiche brought me to an herber feyre and grene Made with benchis ful craftily and clene;	<i>got completely exhausted greatly; journey came; narrow arbor fair skillfully; neatly</i>
50	That, as me thought, myght no creature Devise a bettir by proporcional. Save it was closed wele, I yow ensure, With masonry of compas environ Ful secretly, with steyres goyng down 55 In myddes the place, a tornyng whele, sertayne, And upon that a pot of margoleyne;	<i>a better proportioned one Safely; assure in a circle all around</i> <i>marjoram</i>
	With margarites growyng in ordynaunce To shewe hem self as folk went to and fro, That to behold it was a grete plesaunce;	<i>daisies; in regular patterns</i>

<sup>1</sup> *And took our ways, each according to a different plan*

<sup>2</sup> *And as they looked out to and fro for an advantage for themselves*

## *The Assembly of Ladies*

- |    |  |   |
|----|--|---|
| 60 | And how they were accompanied with mo,<br>Ne m'oublie-mies and sovenez also; <sup>1</sup><br>The poore penses ne were nat dislodged there —<br>No, no, God wote, theyr place was every where.  | others<br>pansies; excluded<br>knows  |
| 65 | The floore beneth was paved faire and smoth<br>With stones square of many dyvers hewe<br>So wele joyned that, for to sey the soth,<br>Al semed on, who that non other knewe.<br>And underneth the stremes, newe and newe,<br>As silver newe bright spryngyng in such wise<br>That whens it com ye cowde it nat devise. | <i>a single unbroken whole</i><br><i>springs; ever afresh</i><br><i>fashion</i><br><i>whence; came; could</i>                                     |
| 70 | A litel while thus was I alone<br>Beholdyng wele this delectable place;<br>My felawshyp were comyng everichone<br>So must me nede abide as for a space,<br>Remembryng of many dyvers cace<br>Of tyme past, musyng with sighes depe,<br>I set me downe and there fil in slepe.  | <i>each one</i><br><i>So I had of necessity to; time</i><br><i>happenings</i><br><i>fell</i>  |
| 75 | And as I slept me thought ther com to me<br>A gentil womman metely of stature;<br>Of grete worship she semed for to be,<br>Atired wele, nat hye but bi mesure,<br>Hir contenaunce ful sad and ful demure,<br>Hir colours blewe, al that she had upon;<br>Theyr com no mo but hir silf alon.                            | <i>moderate</i><br><i>honor and worthiness</i><br><i>grandly; soberly</i><br><i>grave</i>   |
| 80 | There; others; herself   |   |
| 85 | Hir gowne was wele embrowdid, certaynly,<br>With sovenez aftir hir owne devise;<br>On the purfil hir word, by and by,<br><i>Bien loialment</i> , as I cowde me avise.<br>Than prayd I hir in every maner wise<br>That of hir name I myght have remembraunce.<br>She sayde she was callid Perseveraunce.                | <i>embroidered</i><br><i>remember-me's; emblem</i><br><i>hem; motto; word for word</i><br><i>'Very loyally'; discern</i><br><i>most earnestly</i> |
| 90 |  |   |

<sup>1</sup> Not only forget-me-not's, but remember-me's also

*The Assembly of Ladies*

- So furthermore to speke than was I bold: *then*  
 Where she dwelt I prayed hir for to say.  
 And she ageyne ful curteisly me told:  
 95 'My dwellyng is and hath be many a day *been*  
 With a lady.' 'What lady, I yow pray?'  
 'Of grete astate, thus warne I yow,' quod she.  
 'What calle ye hir?' 'Hir name is Loiaulte.' *I tell you for a fact*
- 'In what office stand ye, or in what degré?' *rank*  
 100 Quod I to hir, 'that wold I wit ful fayne.' *would; gladly know*  
 'I am,' quod she, 'unworthy though I be,  
 Of hir chamber hir ussher in certayne;  
 This rodde I bere as for a tokene playne,  
 Lyke as ye knowe the rule in suche service  
 105 Perteyneng unto the same office. *certainly*
- She charged me be hir comaundement  
 To warne yow and youre felawes everichone  
 That ye shuld come there as she is present  
 For a counsaile, whiche shuld be anone,  
 110 Or seven dayes bien comen and gone. *to where*  
 And more she badde that I shuld sey  
 Excuse ther myght be none nor delay. *council*  
*Before; are*  
*And furthermore*
- Another thyng was nygh forgete behynd *nearly forgotten in passing*  
 Whiche in no wise I wold nat but ye knewe —  
 115 Remembre it wele and bere it in your mynde:  
 Al youre felawes and ye must com in blewe,  
 Everiche yowre matier for to sewe,  
 With more, whiche I pray yow thynk upon,  
 Yowre wordes on yowre slevis everichon. *blue*  
*petition; present*  
*mottoes; sleeves*
- 120 And be nat ye abasshed in no wise,  
 As many as bien in suche an high presence;  
 Make youre request as ye can best devise  
 And she gladly wil yeve yow audience. *Though many are*  
 Ther is no grief nor no maner offence  
 125 Wherin ye fele your hert is displeased  
 But with hir help right sone ye shul bien eased.' *give*  
*be*

*The Assembly of Ladies*

- 130     'I am right glad,' quod I, 'ye telle me this;  
 But ther is none of us that knowith the way.'  
 'And of your wey,' quod she, 'ye shul nat mys;  
 Ye shul have one to guyde yow day be day  
 Of my felawes — I can no better say —  
 Suche on as shal telle yow the wey ful right;  
 And Diligence this gentil womman hight,  
*shall not go wrong*  
*is called*
- 135     A womman of right famous governaunce  
 And wele cherisshed, I sey yow for certeyne;  
 Hir felawship shal do yow grete plesaunce,  
 Hir porte is suche, hir manere is trewe and playne;  
 She with glad chiere wil do hir busy peyne  
 To bryng yow there. Farwele, now have I done.'  
 'Abide,' quod I, 'ye may nat go so soone.'
- 140     'Whi so?' quod she, 'and I have fer to go  
 To yeve warnyng in many dyvers place  
 To youre felawes and so to other moo,  
 And wele ye wote I have but litel space.'  
 'Yit,' quod I, 'ye must telle me this cace,  
 If we shal any men unto us calle?'  
 'Nat one,' quod she, 'may come among yow alle.'
- 145     'Nat one?' quod I, 'ey, benedicite!  
 What have they don? I pray yow, telle me that.'  
 'Now, be my lif, I trowe but wele,' quod she,  
 'But evere I can beleve ther is somwhat,  
 And for to sey yow trouth, more can I nat;  
 In questions nothyng may I be to large,  
 I medle me no further than is my charge.'
- 150     'Than thus,' quod I, 'do me til undrestond  
 What place is there this lady is dwellyng?'  
 'Forsoth,' quod she, 'and on sought al a lond,  
 Feirer is none, though it were fore a kyng;  
 Devised wele, and that in every thyng;  
 The toures high ful plesaunt shul ye fynde,  
 With fanes fressh tournyng with every wynde;
- 155     *for I have far  
 give  
 others more  
 time to spare  
 point*
- 160     *oh, my goodness!  
 by my life; believe  
 too open and unconstrained  
 get involved; responsibility*
- 155     *give to me  
 even if one searched*
- 160     *Well planned  
 weather vanes*

## *The Assembly of Ladies*

- |     |   |   |
|-----|---|---|
| 165 | The chambres and parlours both of oo sort,<br>With bay wyndowes goodely as can be thought,<br>As for daunsyng and other wise disport;<br>The galaries right wonderfully wrought;<br>That wele I wote, yef ye were thider brought<br>And toke good hede therof in every wise,<br>Ye wold it thynk a verray paradise.'                    | <i>of the same kind<br/>kinds of amusement<br/>an absolute</i>                                |
| 170 | 'What hight this place?' quod I, 'now sey me that.'<br>'Plesaunt Regard,' quod she, 'to telle yow pleyne.'<br>'Of verray trouth?' quod I, 'and wote ye what,<br>It may wele be callid so sertayne.<br>But furthermore this wold I wite ful fayne,<br>What shal I do as soone as I com there<br>And after whom that I may best enquere?' | <i>is called<br/>Indeed?; know<br/>certainly<br/>gladly</i>                                   |
| 175 | 'A gentilwomman, porter at the yaate,<br>Ther shal ye fynde; hir name is Contenaunce.<br>If so happe ye com erly or late,<br>Of hir were goode to have som aqueyntaunce;<br>She can telle how ye shal yow best avaunce<br>And how to come to this ladyes presence;<br>To hir wordis I rede yow yeve credence.'                          | <i>gate<br/>Self-Control<br/>whether it happens<br/>put yourself forward<br/>advise; give</i> |
| 180 | Now it is tyme that I part yow fro,<br>For in goode soth I have grete busynesse.'<br>'I wote right wele,' quod I, 'that that is soo,<br>And I thanke yow of youre grete gentilnesse;<br>Yowre comfort hath yeve me suche hardynesse<br>That now I shal be bold withouten faile<br>To do after youre avise and counsaile.'               | <i>from you<br/>so<br/>courtesy<br/>given; confidence<br/>advice</i>                          |
| 185 | Thus parted she and I left al alone.<br>With that I sawe, as I behielde aside,<br>A womman come, a verray goodely oon,<br>And furth withal as I had hir aspied<br>Me thought anon that it shuld be the guyde;<br>And of hir name anon I did enquere;<br>Ful wommanly she yave this answere:   | <i>I remained<br/>to one side<br/>And immediately<br/>gave</i>                                |
| 190 |   |   |
| 195 |   |   |

*The Assembly of Ladies*

- ‘I am,’ quod she, ‘a symple creature  
 Sent from the court; my name is Diligence.  
 As soone as I myght com, I yow ensure,  
 I taried nat after I had licence,  
 And now that I am com to yowre presence,  
 Looke what service that I can do or may  
 Comaunde me, I can no further say.’
- I thanked hir and prayed hir to come nere  
 Because I wold se how she were arrayed.  
 Hir gowne was bliew, dressed in goode manere  
 With hir devise, hir worde also, that sayde  
*Taunt que je puis*; and I was wele apayed,  
 For than wist I without any more  
 It was ful triew that I had herd afore.
- ‘Though we toke now before a lite space  
 It were ful goode,’ quod she, ‘as I cowth gesse.’  
 ‘How fer,’ quod I, ‘have we unto that place?’  
 ‘A dayes journey,’ quod she, ‘but litel lesse,  
 Wherfor I rede that we onward dresse,  
 For I suppose oure felawship is past  
 And for nothyng I wold that we were last.’
- Than parted we at spryngyng of the day  
 And furth we wente a soft and esy pase,  
 Til at the last we were on oure journey  
 So fer onward that we myght se the place.  
 ‘Nowe lete us rest,’ quod I, ‘a litel space,  
 And say we as devoutly as we can  
 A Pater Noster for seynt Julyan.’
- ‘With al myn hert,’ quod she, ‘I gre me wele;  
 Moche better shul we sped whan we have done.’  
 Than taryed we and sayde it every dele.  
 And whan the day was fer gon after none  
 We sawe a place, and thider come we sone,  
 Whiche rounde about was closid with a wal  
 Semyng to me ful like an hospital.

*assure  
permission to leave*

*Whatever service*

*adorned*

*emblem; motto*

*‘As much as I can’; pleased  
knew*

*set off; little while  
could*

*advise; proceed*

*not for anything*

*pace*

*An ‘Our Father’*

*I heartily agree  
prosper  
every bit*

*The Assembly of Ladies*

- There fonde I oon had brought al myn array,  
 A gentilwomman of myn acqueyntaunce.  
 'I have mervaile,' quod I, 'what maner wey  
 235      Ye had knowlache of al this governaunce?'      *knowledge; arrangement*  
 'Yis, yis,' quod she, 'I herd Perseveraunce,  
 How she warned youre felawes everichone,  
 And what array that ye shal have upon.'
- 'Now, for my love,' quod I, 'I yow pray,  
 240      Sith ye have take upon yow al this peyne,  
 That ye wold helpe me on with myne array,  
 For wite ye wele I wold be go ful fayne.'<sup>1</sup>      *Since; trouble*  
 'Al this prayer nedith nat certeyne,'      *is quite unnecessary*  
 Quod she ageyne; 'com of, and hie yow soone,  
 245      And ye shal se how wele it shal be done.'      *come on; hasten*
- 'But this I dowte me gretely, wote ye what,  
 That my felaws bien passed by and gone.'  
 'I waraunt yow,' quod she, 'that ar they nat,  
 250      For here they shul assemble everichon.  
 Natwithstanding, I counsel yow anone  
 Make ye redy and tarye ye no more;  
 It is non harme though ye be there afore.'
- So than I dressid me in myn array  
 And asked hir if it were wele or noo.  
 255      'It is,' quod she, 'right wele unto my pay;  
 Ye dare nat care to what place so ever ye goo.'      *to my satisfaction*  
 And while that she and I debated soo  
 Com Diligence, and sawe me al in bliew:  
 'Suster,' quod she, 'right wel broke ye your niewe.'<sup>2</sup>      *need not worry*
- 260      Than went we forth and met at aventure      *by chance*  
 A yong womman, an officer semyng.      *by appearance*  
 'What is your name,' quod I, 'goode creature?'

<sup>1</sup> *Believe me I would gladly be gone*

<sup>2</sup> *'Sister,' she said, 'your new clothes suit you very well'*

*The Assembly of Ladies*

	‘Discrecioun,’ quod she, ‘without lesyng.’	<i>falsehood</i>
	‘And where,’ quod I, ‘is yowre abidyng?’	<i>abode</i>
265	‘I have,’ quod she, ‘this office of purchace, Chief purvour that longith to this place.’	<i>purchasing supplies</i> <i>purveyor; belongs</i>
	‘Faire love,’ quod I, ‘in al youre ordynaunce, What is hir name that is the herbegyer?’	<i>organization</i> <i>lodgings-officer</i>
	‘Forsoth,’ quod she, ‘hir name is Aqueyntaunce, A womman of right graciouse maner.’	<i>Friendship</i>
270	Than thus quod I, ‘What straungiers have ye here?’ ‘But fewe,’ quod she, ‘of hie degré ne lowe; Ye bien the first, as ferforth as I knowe.’	<i>as far as</i>
	Thus with talis we com streyght to the yaate; This yong womman departed was and gone. Com Diligence and knokked fast therate.	<i>chat; gate</i>
275	‘Who is without?’ quod Contenaunce anone. ‘Triewly,’ quod she, ‘faire suster, here is one.’	
	‘Whiche oon?’ quod she; and ther-withal she lough: ‘I, Diligence, ye knowe me wele inough!’	<i>laughed</i>
	Than opened she the gate and in we goo. With wordis feyre she sayde ful gently: ‘Ye ben welcom, iwis; bien ye no mo?’	<i>courteously</i> <i>indeed</i>
280	‘No,’ quod she, ‘save this womman and I.’ ‘Now than,’ quod she, ‘I pray yow hertily, Take my chambre as for a while to rest To yowre felawes bien comen, I hold it for the best.’	<i>Until</i>
	I thanked hir and furth we gon echeon Til hir chambre without wordes mo.	<i>To; more</i>
285	Come Diligence and toke hir leve anon; ‘Where ever yow list,’ quod I, ‘nowe may ye goo, And I thank yow right hertily also Of yowre laboure, for whiche God do yow mede; I can nomore, but Jhesu be yowre spede.’	<i>it pleases you</i>  <i>reward</i> <i>can say; help</i>

*The Assembly of Ladies*

295     Than Contenaunce asked me anone:  
‘Yowre felawship, where bien they now?’ quod she.  
‘Forsoth,’ quod I, ‘they bien comyng echeone,  
But in certeyne I knowe nat where they be.  
At this wyndow whan they come ye may se;  
300     Here wil I stande awaityng ever among,<sup>1</sup>  
For wele I wote they wil nat now be long.’

Thus as I stode musyng ful busily  
I thought to take heede of hir array.  
Hir gowne was bliew, this wote I verily,  
305     Of goode facion and furred wele with gray;<sup>2</sup>  
Upon hir sleeve hir worde, this is no nay,  
The whiche saide thus, as my penne can endite,  
*A moy que je voy*, writhen with lettres white.

*there is no denying it  
write  
'To me what I see'*

310     Than ferforth as she com streyght unto me,  
‘Yowre worde,’ quod she ‘fayne wold I that I knewe.’  
‘Forsoth,’ quod I, ‘ye shal wele know and se:  
And for my word, I have none, this is trewe;  
It is inough that my clothynge be blew  
As here before I had comaundement,  
315     And so to do I am right wele content.

*immediately as*

But telle me this, I pray yow hertily,  
The stiward here, sey me, what is hir name?  
‘She hight Largesse, I say yow surely,  
320     A faire lady and right of nobil fame;  
Whan ye hir se ye wil report the same.  
And undir hir, to bid yow welcom alle,  
There is Bealchiere, the marchal of the halle.

*is called Generosity  
of truly noble*

*Good Cheer*

Now al this while that ye here tary stille  
Yowre owne matiers ye may wele have in mynde;  
325     But telle me this, have ye brought any bille?’

*petition*

<sup>1</sup> *Here I will stand, looking out every now and then*

<sup>2</sup> *Of good fashion and well-trimmed with gray fur*

*The Assembly of Ladies*

- ‘Ye, ye,’ quod I, ‘or ellis I were behynde;  
Where is ther on, telle me, that I may fynde  
To whom I may shewe my matiers playne?’ *remiss*  
‘Surely,’ quod she, ‘unto the chambrelayne.’ *openly*
- 330 ‘The chambrelayne,’ quod I, ‘say ye trewe?’ *by my advice*  
‘Ye verily,’ quod she, ‘be myn advise,  
Be nat aferd but lowly til hir shewe.’ *humbly; make petition*  
‘It shal be don,’ quod I, ‘as ye devise,  
But me must knowe hir name in every wyse.’ *suggest*  
335 ‘Triewly,’ quod she, ‘to telle yow in substaunce,  
Without feyneng, hir name is Remembraunce. *in any case*  
*in short*  
*evasion*
- The secretarye yit may nat be forgete,  
For she may do right moche in every thyng; *much*  
Wherfor I rede whan ye have with hir met *advise*  
340 Yowre matier hole telle hir withoute feyneng;  
Ye shal hir fynde ful goode and ful lovyng.’ *whole petition*  
‘Telle me hir name,’ quod I, ‘of gentillesse.’ *out of courtesy*  
‘Be my goode soth,’ quod she, ‘Avisenesse.’ *truth; Circumspection*
- 345 ‘That name,’ quod I, ‘for hir is passyng goode,  
For every bille and cedula she must se. *extremely*  
Now, goode,’ quod I, ‘com stonde where I stoode;  
My felawes bien comyng, yonder they be.’ *written petition*  
‘Is it a jape, or say ye soth?’ quod she. *good lady*  
‘In jape? nay, nay! I say it for certeyne;  
350 Se how they come togyder tweyne and tweyne.’ *two by two*
- ‘Ye say ful soth,’ quod she, ‘it is no nay;  
I se comyng a goodely company.’ *it cannot be denied*  
‘They bien,’ quod I, ‘suche folk, I dare wele say,  
That list to love, thynk it ful verily; *That desire; believe*  
355 And my faire love, I pray yow feithfully,  
At any tyme whan they upon yow cal,  
That ye wil be goode frend to theym al.’

*The Assembly of Ladies*

- ‘Of my frendship,’ quod she, ‘they shul nat mys,  
As for ther case to put therto my Payne.’ *utmost exertion*  
360 ‘God yield it yow,’ quod I; ‘but telle me this:  
How shal we knowe whiche is the chambrelayne?’ *repay*  
‘That shal ye wele knowe by hir worde certayne.’ *truly*  
‘What is hir worde, suster, I pray yow say?’  
‘*Plus ne purroy*, thus writeth she alway.’ *I could [do] no more*
- 365 Thus as we stooode to-gydre, she and I,  
At the yate my felawes were echon.  
So mette I theym, as me thought was goodely,  
And bad hem welcom al by one and oon. *polite*  
Than forth com Contenaunce anon:  
370 ‘Ful hertily, feyre sustres al,’ quod she,  
‘Ye bien right welcom to this contre.
- I counseile yow to take a litel rest  
In my chambre, if it be youre plesaunce.  
Whan ye bien there me thynk it for the best  
375 That I gon in and cal Perseveraunce  
Because she is oon of youre acqueytaunce,  
And she also wil telle yow every thyng  
How ye shal be rulyd of your comyng.’ *concerning your arrival*
- 380 My felawes al and I, be oon avise,  
Were wele agreed to do as she sayde.  
Than we began to dresse us in oure guyse  
That folk shuld se us nat unpurvayde,  
And wageours among us there we layde  
385 Whiche of us atired were goodeliest  
And whiche of us al preyed shuld be best.
- The porter than brought Perseveraunce;  
She welcomd us in ful curteys manere:  
‘Thynk ye nat long,’ quod she, ‘youre attendaunce;  
I wil go speke unto the herbergier  
390 That she may purvey for youre loggyng here,  
Than wil I gon to the chambrelayne  
To speke for yow, and come anon agayne.’ *consider; wait*  
*lodgings-officer*  
*provide*

*The Assembly of Ladies*

- 395      And whan she departed and was agone  
          We sawe folkes comyng without the wal,  
          So grete people that nombre couthe we none.<sup>1</sup>  
          Ladies they were and gentil wymmen al  
          Clothed in bliew everiche, her wordes withal;  
          But for to knowe theyr wordis or devise  
          They com so thycke we myght in no wise.      *with their mottoes too*
- 400      405      With that anon come Perseveraunce  
          And wher I stoode she com streight to me:  
          ‘Ye bien,’ quod she, ‘of myn old acqueyntaunce,  
          Yow to enquire the bolder dare I be  
          What worde they bere eche after theyr degré;      *rank*  
          I pray yow telle it me in secrete wise  
          And I shal kepe it close on warantise.’      *I guarantee*
- 410      ‘We bien,’ quod I, ‘fyve ladies al in feere,  
          And gentil wymmen foure in company;  
          Whan they begynne to opyn theyr matiere  
          There shal ye knowe her wordis, by and by.      *all in company*  
          But as for me I have none verily  
          And so I told to Countenaunce here afore;  
          Al myn array is bliew, what nedith more?’      *their; one after another*
- 415      420      ‘Now,’ quod she, ‘I wil go in agayne,  
          That ye may know what ye shal do.’  
          ‘Forsoth,’ quod I, ‘yif ye wil take the peyne,  
          Ye dide right moche for us, yif ye did so;  
          The rather sped the sonner may we go.<sup>2</sup>      *Great harm*  
          Grete cost alwey there is in taryeng,  
          And long to sue it is a very thyng.’
- Than parted she and come agayne anon:  
          ‘Ye must,’ quod she, ‘com to the chambrelayne.’  
          ‘We bien,’ quod I, ‘now redy, everichone,

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<sup>1</sup> *So many people that we had no notion of the number*

<sup>2</sup> *The sooner dealt with, the sooner we may depart*

*The Assembly of Ladies*

- 425 To folowe yow whan ever yow list, certeyne.  
We have none eloquence, to telle yow pleyne,  
Besechyg yow we may be so excused  
Oure triewe meanyng that it be nat refused.'
- 430 Than went we forth after Perseveraunce.  
To se the prease it was a wonder case;  
There for to passe it was grete combraunce,  
The people stoode so thykk in every place.  
'Now stonde ye stille,' quod she, 'a litel space,  
And for yowre ease somwhat shal I assay  
Yif I can make yow any better way.'
- 435 And furth she goth among hem everychon,  
Makynge a wey that we myght thurgh passe  
More at oure ease, and whan she had don  
She bekened us to com ther as she was,  
So after hir we folowed more and lasse.
- 440 She brought us streight unto the chambrelayne;  
There left she us and than she went agayne.
- 445 We salwed hir as reson wold it soo,  
Ful humbly besechyg hir goodenesse,  
In oure matiers that we had for to doo,  
That she wold be goode lady and maystresse.  
'Ye bien welcom,' quod she, 'in sothfastnesse,  
And so what I can do yow for to please  
I am redy, that may be for youre ease.'
- 450 We folowed hir unto the chambre doore;  
'Suster,' quod she, 'come in ye after me.'  
But wite ye wele, ther was a paved floore,  
The goodeliest that any wight myght see;
- 455 And furthermore aboute than loked we  
On eche a corner and upon every wal,  
The whiche is made of berel and cristal;
- throng; wonderful thing  
inconvenience*
- one and all*
- greeted*
- certainty*
- person*
- beryl*

*The Assembly of Ladies*

- Wheron was graven of storyes many oon:  
 First how Phillis of wommanly pite  
 Deyd pitously for the love of Demephon;  
 Next after was the story of Thesbe,  
 460 How she slowe hir self under a tre;  
 Yit sawe I more how in pitous case  
 For Antony was slayne Cleopatrace;
- That other syde was how Melusene  
 Untriewly was disceyved in hir bayne;  
 465 Ther was also Anelada the quene  
 Upon Arcite how sore she did complayne;  
 Al these storyes wer graven ther certayne  
 And many mo than I reherce yow here —  
 It were to long to telle yow al in feere.
- 470 And bicause the wallis shone so bright  
 With fyne umple they were al over-spredde  
 To that entent folk shuld nat hurt theyr sight,  
 And thurgh that the storyes myght be redde.  
 Than further I went as I was ledde
- 475 And there I sawe without any faile  
 A chayer set with ful riche apparaile;
- And fyve stages it was set from the grounde,  
 Of cassidony ful curiously wrought,  
 480 With foure pomels of gold and verray rounde  
 Set with saphirs as fyne as myght be thought.  
 Wote ye what, yif it were thurgh sought  
 As I suppose from this contre til Ynde,  
 Another suche it were hard to fynde.
- 485 For wete ye wele, I was ful nere that,  
 So as I durst beholdyng by and by.  
 Above ther was a riche cloth of state  
 Wrought with the nedil ful straungely,  
 Hir worde theron, and thus it sayde triewly:  
 490 A *Endurer*, to telle in wordis fewe,  
 With grete lettres, the better for to shewe.
- engraved  
because of  
Died
- slew
- deceived; bath
- recount  
too; completely
- gauze
- adornment
- steps  
chalcedony; intricately  
knobs; completely
- if; thoroughly searched  
India
- know you well  
every detail in turn  
canopy  
unusually
- '[Ever] to endure'  
capital

*The Assembly of Ladies*

- Thus as we stoode a doore opened anon;  
A gentil womman semely of stature, *comely*  
Beryng a mace, com out, hir self alone —  
Trewly, me thought, a goodely creature.  
495 She spak nothyng to lowde, I yow ensure, *too*  
Nor hastily, but bi goodely warnyng: *with polite warning*  
'Make roome,' quod she, 'my lady is comyng.'
- With that anon I saw Perseveraunce  
How she hield up the tappet in hir hande.  
500 I sawe also in right goode ordynaunce *held; cloth-hanging*  
*orderly fashion*  
This grete lady withyn the tappet gan stande,  
Comyng outward, I wil ye undrestande,  
And after hir a noble company,  
I cowde nat telle the nombre sikerly. *for certain*
- 505 Of theyr names I wold nothyng enquere  
Further than suche as we wold sue unto,  
Sauf oo lady whiche was the chaunceler — *Except for one*  
Attemperaunce, sothly, hir name was soo — *Temperance*  
For us must with hir have moche to doo  
510 In oure matiers and alwey more and more.  
And so furth to telle yow furthermore:
- Of this lady hir beauties to discryve *describe*  
My konnyng is to symple verily, *skill*  
For never yit the dayes of al my live *life*  
515 So inly fayre I have none sene triewly,  
In hir astate assured utterly; *noble state*  
Ther lakked naught, I dare yow wele ensure,  
That longged to a goodely creature. *was appropriate*
- 520 And furthermore to speke of hyr aray  
I shall yow tell the maner of hyr goune:  
Of cloth of gold full ryche, hyt ys no nay,  
The colour blew of a ryght good fassion, *blue; fashion*

*The Assembly of Ladies*

	In taberd wyse, the slevys hangyng don; <sup>1</sup> And what purfyll ther was and in what wyse So as I can I shall hyt yow devyse.	embroidered hem describe
525	Aftyr a sort the coler and the vent, <sup>2</sup> Lyke as ermyne ys made in purfelyng, With gret perles full fyne and oryent They were couchyd all aftyr oon worchyng <sup>3</sup>	used in trimming borders precious
530	With dyamondes in stede of pouderyng; The slevys and purfylls of assyse, They were made lyke in every wyse;	'powdering' with ermine tails sleeves; fur-trim; fashion in the same style
535	Abowte hir nekke a serpe of fayre rubies In white floures of right fyne enemayle; Upon hir hede sette in the fresshest wise A cercle with grete balays of entaille; That in ernest to speke, withouten faille, For yong and old and every maner age It was a world to loke on hir visage.	neck-ring
540	This comyng to sit in hir astate, In hir presence we knelid downe echeon Presentyng up oure billis and, wote ye what, Ful humbly she toke hem by oon and oon. Whan we had don than com they al anon	diadem; ruby with engraving
545	And dide the same iche after in theyr manere, Knelyng attones and risyng al in feere.	supreme delight
550	Whan this was don, and she sette in hir place, The chambrelayne she dide unto hir cal, And she goodely comyng til hir a-pace Of hir intent knowyng nothyng at al: 'Voyde bak the prease,' quod she, 'unto the wal;	This [lady] having come at the same time; together
		with brisk stride Remove; throng

<sup>1</sup> *In the style of a herald's coat, the sleeves hanging down*

<sup>2</sup> *According to the same pattern, the collar and the neck*

<sup>3</sup> *They were studded all according to a single design*

*The Assembly of Ladies*

Make larger rome, but loke ye do nat tarye,  
And take these billes unto the secretarye.'

555 The chambrelayne dide hir comaundement  
And come ageyne as she was bode to doo; *bidden*

The secretarie there beyng present  
The billes were delyvered til hir also,  
Nat only oures but many another moo.  
Than this lady with gode avise ageyne

560 Anone withal callid hir chambrelayne. *discernment  
straightway with that*

'We wil,' quod she, 'the first thyng that ye doo,  
The secretary make hir come anon  
With hir billes, and thus we wille also,  
In oure presence she rede hem everychone  
565 That we may take goode avise theron  
Of the ladyes whiche bien of oure counsaile.  
Looke this be don without any faile.'

570 The chambrelayn whan she wist hir entent  
Anon she dide the secretary calle:  
'Lete yowre billes,' quod she, 'be here present;  
My lady it wil.' 'Madame,' quod she, 'I shal.'  
'In hir presence she wil ye rede hem al.'  
'With goode wil I am redy,' quod she,  
'At hir pleasure whan she comaundith me.'

575 And upon that was made an ordynaunce  
They that com first theyr billes to be redde.  
Ful gently than seyde Perseveraunce:  
'Reason it wold that they were sonnest spedde.'  
580 Anon withal upon a tappet spredde  
The secretary layde hem downe everichon;  
Oure billes first she red oon by oon.

The first lady, beryng in hir devise  
*Sanz que jamais*, thus wrote she in hir bille:<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 'Without ever [giving cause],' thus she wrote in her petition

## *The Assembly of Ladies*

- |     |  |  |
|-----|--|--|
| 585 | Compleyneng sore and in ful pitous wise<br>Of promesse made with feithful hert and wil<br>And so broken ayenst al maner skille,<br>Without desert always in hir party,<br>In this matier desiryng remedy.  | reason<br>on her part                                      |
| 590 | Hir next felawes word was in this wise —<br><i>Une sans chaungier</i> ; and thus she did compleyne:<br>Though she had bien gwerdoned for hir service,<br>Yit nothyng, as she takith it, pleyne,<br>Wherfor she cowde in no wise restreyne<br>But in this case sue until hir presence,<br>As reason wold, to have recompence.   | 'One without changing'<br>rewarded<br>fully<br>unto        |
| 595 | So furthermore to speke of other tweyne:<br>Oon of hem wrote after hir fantasye<br><i>Oncques puis lever</i> , and for to telle yow pleyne,<br>Hir compleynt was grevous verily<br>For as she sayde ther was grete reason why,<br>And as I can remembre that matiere<br>I shal yow telle the processe al in fere. <sup>1</sup> | fancy<br>'I can never rise'                                |
| 600 | Hir bille was made compleyneng in her guyse<br>That of hir joye, comfort and gladnesse<br>Was no suerte, for in no maner wise<br>She fonde therin no poynt of stabilnesse, <sup>2</sup><br>Now ill now wele, out of al sikernesse;<br>Ful humble desiryng of her grace<br>Som remedy to shewe in this case.                    | in her fashion<br>certainty<br>security<br>humbly<br>offer |
| 610 | Hir felaw made hir bille, and thus she sayde<br>In pleyneng wise: ther as she lovid best,<br>Whethir she were wroth or ill apayde,<br>She myght nat se whan she wold faynest,<br>And wroth was she in verray ernest  | pleased  |

<sup>1</sup> *I shall give you a full account of the matter*

<sup>2</sup> She discovered therein not the least bit of stability

*The Assembly of Ladies*

- 615 To telle hir worde, and forsoth, as I wote,  
*Entierment vostre* right thus she wrote. ‘Entirely yours’
- And upon that she made a grete request,  
 With hert and wil and al that myght be done,  
 As until hir that myght redresse it best, unto  
 620 For in hir mynde thus myght she fynde it sone  
 The remedy of that whiche was hir bone;  
 Rehersyng that she had seyd before,  
 Besechyng hir it myght be so no more. request
- And in like wise as they had don before  
 625 The gentil wymmen of oure company  
 Put up their billes; and for to telle yow more,  
 One of hem wrote *C'est sanz dire*, verily;  
 Of hir compleynt also the cause why  
 Withyn hir bille she put it in writyng,  
 630 And what it saide ye shul have knowlachyng. knowledge
- It sayde, God wote, and that ful pitously,  
 Like as she was disposed in hir hert,  
 No mysfortune that she toke grevously,  
 Al on til hir it was the joy or smert;  
 635 Somtyme no thank for al hir desert;  
 Other comfort she wayted non comyng,  
 And so used it greved hir nothyng; took to heart  
*All one to her; pain*  
*In the past no reward*  
*expected none to come*  
*And being so used*
- Desiryng hir and lowly hir besechyng  
 That she for hir wold se a bettir way, provide  
 640 As she that had bien al hir dayes livyng As one  
 Stadefast and triewe and so wil be alway.  
 Of hir felaw somwhat shal I yow say,  
 Whos bille was redde next after forth withal,  
 And what it ment reherce yow I shal. forthwith  
*recount*
- 645 *En dieu est* she wrote in hir devise, ‘In God is [my trust]’  
 And thus she sayde, without any faile:  
 Hir trowth myght be take in no wise accepted as of value

*The Assembly of Ladies*

- Like as she thought, wherfor she had mervaile,  
For trowth somtyme was wont to take availe  
650 In eche matiere, but now al that is goo —  
The more pite that it is suffred soo.
- Moche more ther was wherof she shuld compleyne  
But she thought it to grete encombraunce *burden*  
So moche to write, and therfor, in certayne,  
655 In God and hir she put hir affiaunce, *trust*  
As in hir worde is made a remembraunce,  
Besechyg hir that she wold in that case  
Shewe til hir the favour of hir grace.
- The thridde she wrote rehersyng hir grevaunce,  
660 Yee, wote ye what, a pitous thyng to here, *Yea*  
For as me thought she felt grete displesaunce —  
One myght wele perceyve bi hir chiere,  
And no wonder, it sat hir passyng neere; *affected her very deeply*  
665 Yit loth she was to put it in writyng,  
But neede wil have his cours in every thyng. *necessity; its way*
- Sejour ensure* this was hir worde certeyne,  
And thus she wrote but in litel space: *'Rest assured'*  
There she loved hir labour was in vayne  
For he was sette al in another place;  
670 Ful humble desiryng in that cace *humbly*  
Som goode comfort hir sorow to appese  
That she myght live more at hertis ease.
- The fourth surely, me thought, she liked wele,  
As in hir port and in hir havyng, *was well pleased*  
675 And *Bien monest*, as ferre as I cowth feele, *demeanor; behavior*  
That was hir worde, til hir wele belongyng;  
Wherfor til her she prayde above al thyng,  
Ful hertily, to say yow in substaunce, *'Well advised'; perceive*  
That she wold sende hir goode contenuaunce.
- 680 'Ye have rehersed me these billis alle,  
But now late se somwhat of youre entente.'

## *The Assembly of Ladies*

- |     |  |  |
|-----|--|--|
| 685 | 'It may so happe peraventure ye shal.'<br>'Now, I pray yow, while I am here present.'<br>'Ye shal, parde, have knowlache what I ment;<br>But thus I say in trouth, and make no fable,<br>The case it silf is inly lamentable,  | <i>perhaps</i><br><i>indeed</i><br><i>itself; deeply</i>                                   |
| 690 | And wele I wote that ye wil thynk the same<br>Like as I say whan ye han herd my bil.'<br>'Now, goode, telle on, I hate yow, be seynt Jame.'<br>'Abide a while, it is nat yit my wil;<br>Yet must ye wite, bi reason and bi skil,<br>Sith ye knowe al that hath be done afore.'<br>And thus it sayde, without any more: | <i>good lady; bid</i><br><i>according to reason</i>  |
| 695 | 'Nothyng so lief as death to come to me<br>For fynal end of my sorwes and peyne;<br>What shuld I more desire, as seme ye —<br>And ye knewe al afore it for certeyne<br>I wote ye wold; and for to telle yow pleyne,<br>Without hir help that hath al thyng in cure<br>I can nat thynk that it may long endure;         | <i>dear</i><br><i>think</i><br><i>If</i><br><i>in her care</i>                             |
| 700 | And for my trouth, preved it hath bien wele —<br>To sey the soth, it can be no more —<br>Of ful long tyme, and suffred every dele<br>In pacience and kept it al in store;<br>Of hir goodenesse besechyg hir therfor<br>That I myght have my thank in suche wise<br>As my desert deservith of justice.'                 | <i>tested</i><br><i>everything</i><br><i>suffered it all in silence</i><br><i>requital</i> |
| 705 | Whan these billes were redde everichone<br>This lady toke goode avisement,<br>And hem til aunswere, eche on by oon,<br>She thought it to moche in hir entent,<br>Wherfor she yaf in comaundement<br>In hir presence to come both oon and al<br>To yeve hem there hir awnswere in general.                              | <i>consideration</i><br><i>them</i><br><i>too</i><br><i>collectively</i>                   |

*The Assembly of Ladies*

- 715 What did she than, suppose yow, verily?  
 She spak hir silf and seyde in this manere:  
 'We have wele sen youre billis by and by  
 And som of hem ful pitous for to here.  
 We wil therfor ye knowen this al in feere:  
 Withyn short tyme oure court of parlement  
 Here shal be holde in oure paleys present,  
 And in al this wherein ye fynde yow greved  
 There shal ye fynde an open remedy,  
 In suche wise as ye shul be releved  
 Of al that ye reherce heere triewly.  
 As of the date ye shal knowe verily,  
 Than ye may have a space in your comyng,  
 For Diligence shall bryng it yow bi writyng.'
- 720  
 725 We thanked hir in oure most humble wise,  
 Oure felawship echon bi on assent,  
 Submytting us lowly til hir servise,  
 For as us thought we had oure travel spent  
 In suche wise as we hielde us content.  
 Than eche of us toke other by the sleeve,  
 And furth withal, as we shuld take oure leve.  
 Al sodainly the water sprang anone  
 In my visage and therwithal I woke.  
 'Wher am I now?' thought I, 'al this is goon,'  
 Al amased; and up I gan to looke.  
 With that anon I went and made this booke,  
 Thus symply rehersyng the substauce  
 Because it shuld nat out of remembraunce,  
 'Now verily your dreame is passyng goode  
 And worthy to be had in remembraunce,  
 For though I stande here as long as I stoode  
 It shuld to me be none encombraunce,  
 I toke therin so inly grete plesaunce.  
 But tel me now what ye the booke do cal,  
 For me must wite.' 'With right goode wil ye shal:
- one by one*  
*all together*  
*held in this very palace*  
*time to get here*  
*with one accord*  
*labor*  
*And that straightway*  
*bewildered*  
*essentials of the story*  
*burden*  
*truly*

## *The Assembly of Ladies*

- |     |  |   |
|-----|--|---|
| 750 | As for this booke, to sey yow verray right<br>And of the name to tel the certeynte,<br>“La semble de Dames”, thus it hight;<br>How thynk ye that the name is?’ ‘Goode, pard!’<br>‘Now go, farwele, for they cal after me,<br>My felawes al, and I must after sone.’<br>Rede wele my dreame, for now my tale is done. | <i>absolutely correctly</i><br><i>‘The Assembly of Ladies’</i><br><i>indeed</i> |
| 755 |  |   |

## Notes

- 1–3 The autumn opening is rare in comparison with the spring opening (as in *FL*), but was developed because of its appropriateness to rather sad and somber poems (like *AL*).
- 8 *foure*: Thynne, in the first print of *AL*, changed this to *fayre*, presumably because lines 10–11 obviously refer to more than four. But he was wrong, and we must assume that all nine of the *felawship* are there spoken of. The matter is made clear at line 408 and by the sequence of petitions at lines 582–623 and 624–79. There was a fine but clear social distinction between *ladyes* and *gentil wymmen*.
- 10 *crosse aleys*: These sanded alleys, bordered by low rails (see line 42), came to be laid out with greater symmetry in the fifteenth century; here the cross-wise layout forms a kind of maze (see line 17). There is a very similar scene, with a group of ladies walking in a garden with ‘rayled . . . aleys,’ in Chaucer’s *Troilus*, II.813–26.
- 15 *Whereof I serve?*: The blurring of direct into indirect speech is common in Middle English poetry. The sense of the question, ‘What are you doing here?’ is, less politely, ‘What is your function (office, purpose)?’
- 17 *mase*: Mazes became increasingly popular with the formalization of gardens in the late Middle Ages. They also became more difficult to negotiate, with hedges between the alleys (as at Hampton Court) rather than low rails that could be stepped over, as here (see line 42).
- 22 *must me wite*: This impersonal use of *must* with personal object, ‘it is necessary for (me) to’ (also 74, 334, 509, 749), seems a peculiar favorite of the poet of *AL*, though not common elsewhere.
- 48 *herber*: See *FL* 49n.

### Notes

- 55      *tornyng whel*: It is not quite clear what feature of the *herber* is here referred to, whether a spiral staircase, a turnstile, or a circular flower-stand (like a sundial).
- 56      *margoleyne*, etc.: All the flowers in the arbor are emblematic, some by their very names, of serious and constant love.
- 68      *streames*: jets of water issuing from natural spring-heads (ingeniously concealed, line 70) and led through conduits about the garden, in this case to one side of the arbor and below floor level (*underneth*).
- 83      *blewe*: The wearing of blue is emphasized throughout the poem because blue was traditionally the color of truth and fidelity, especially as opposed to green (see *FL* 329n).
- 85–86    *enbrowdid*: There is abundant testimony in France and England in the fifteenth century to the practice of embroidering garments with devices or emblems, especially flowers.
- 87–88    *hir word*: Mottoes, usually in French, were also frequently embroidered on garments, especially on the hems of wide hanging sleeves (see 119). This kind of ornamentation had a rich symbolic language of its own in the ‘game of love’; such mottoes are quite different from family mottoes, being intended as an ingenious form of mystification and not for identification. The mottoes in *AL* (88, 208, 308, 364, 489, 583, 590, 598, 616, 627, 645, 666, 675) belong to no known historical persons, and were probably made up for the purposes of the poem.
- 102     *ussher*: The Usher of the Chamber looked after the food and service in the lord’s room. Distinctions of rank and status (see 99) were carefully observed in a lord’s household, and the carrying of a staff of office (see 103–05) was a jealously guarded privilege.
- 148     *benedicite*: Literally, ‘bless ye (the Lord)!’
- 163     *bay wyndowes*: This is the first recorded use of the term in a literary text. One of the earliest buildings to have bay windows was the palace of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, at Plesaunce, near Greenwich.

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- 165     *galaries*: sheltered walks along the side of a house, partly open at the sides, like a monastic cloister.
- 170     *Plesaunt Regard*: the allegorical reference (buildings often have such names in love-vision poetry) is to the pleasant aspect of a lady towards one who pleases her (cf. *Swete-Lokyn* in Chaucer's *Romaunt of the Rose* 2896), but it is easy to see how the name might be thought appropriate to the building itself (see 171–72).
- 224     *seynt Julyan*: a prayer for good lodging for the night, to St. Julian the Hospitaller, patron saint of hospitality. After accidentally killing his parents, Julian set up a hospital to harbor poor people, and bore travelers across a nearby river as a penance.
- 231     *hospital*: In the Middle Ages the monastic and military-religious orders set up 'hospitals' for the accommodation of poor travelers and pilgrims, for the sick, aged, and insane, and for lepers. The reference to the *wal* (230) is reminiscent of the high continuous walls surrounding leper hospitals.
- 322     *marchal of the halle*: An important functionary of the household, responsible for the arrangement of ceremonies, especially the ordering and serving of guests at banquets.
- 325     *bille*: The usual word in fifteenth-century literature for a written petition or a statement of complaint, especially one concerning faithless or unrequited love, but there is much in *AL*, in the administrative arrangements for the presentation of the bills and in the bills themselves, to suggest that the poet is aware too of the stricter legal sense of the word and is making some attempt to imitate current legal procedure. In law, as in *AL*, the bill was the initiatory action of all procedure in equity; it consisted of a statement of complaint and a prayer for redress; it tended to be vague in point of fact but vehement in presenting the enormity of the offense; it was written in semi-legal parlance, with a profusion of loosely related participles and a convoluted syntax. Closest to *AL* in point of style are bills presented to the King's Council, which, like the court of Lady Loyalty, was approached by suitors as the supreme authority, able to right wrongs of every kind.

### Notes

- 337 *secretarye*: The main job of the secretary — to collect, read over, and read out (553, 564) the written bills — is strikingly reminiscent of the role of the Clerk to the King's Council.
- 419–20 A medieval audience would need little reminding of the notorious dilatoriness of the law, whether in civil or criminal actions.
- 443 *hir goodenesse*: One can see here how an abstract noun comes to be used as a form of title.
- 455 *berel and cristal*: The idea of walls of beryl (not the modern semi-precious stone, but a form of crystal) and crystal is a fantasy, reminiscent of Chaucer's *The House of Fame* and Lydgate's *Temple of Glass*, which in their turn form part of a descriptive tradition going back to the Book of Revelation, Chapter 21.
- 456 *graven*: Tapestries and painted cloths were much more common in domestic interiors (as distinct from churches) than mural decoration, but literary buildings are often embellished with murals, as in Chaucer's *The Parliament of Fowls* (284–94), and The Knight's Tale (1918–2074), and Lydgate's *Temple of Glass* (42–142). The crystal engravings of *AL* are an added touch of fantasy. The *storyes many oon*, as befits the allegory, are of love's martyrs, true and faithful women unfortunate or wronged in love. Chaucer often finds occasion for introducing such lists of unfortunate women, and his *The Legend of Good Women* is a systematic martyrology. Phyllis, Thisbe, and Cleopatra usually figure in Chaucer's lists, and he tells the stories of all three in the *Legend*.
- 457 *of wommanly pite*: The idea is that Phyllis's misfortunes were due to her first taking pity on Demophon when he was shipwrecked on the shores of her kingdom. See *Legend* 2394–2561.
- 460 *under a tre*: The mulberry tree figures importantly in the story of Pyramus and Thisbe.
- 462 *was slayne*: This rather misses the point of Cleopatra's suicide. For the medieval view of Cleopatra as one of love's martyrs, see *Legend* 580–705.

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- 463 *Melusene*: The heroine of a well-known story, translated from the French in two English fifteenth-century versions, *Melusine* (ed. A. K. Donald, EETS, o.s. 68, 1895) and *Partenay* (ed. W. W. Skeat, EETS, o.s. 22, 1866). Melusine was under a spell and used to turn into a serpent from the waist down every Saturday. When she married Count Raymond, she made him promise not to try to find out where she went on Saturdays. She proved a true and faithful wife, and bore him ten children, but Raymond's curiosity finally got the better of him. He followed her one Saturday, hacked a hole with his sword in the door of the room where she used to lock herself, and found her in the bath with her serpent's tail. His betrayal of the secret brings about her perpetual damnation.
- 465 *Anelada*: from Chaucer's *Anelida and Arcite*, much of which is devoted to Anelida's *Compleynt*.
- 477 *stages*: Mandeville describes an elaborate throne set on seven 'degrees' or steps in the palace of Prester John (*Travels*, ed. P. Hamelius, EETS, o.s. 153, 1919, p. 183), very similar to the throne of Darius in the Alexander legend (see *Wars of Alexander*, ed. H. Duggan and T. Turville-Petre, EETS, s.s. 10, 1989, 3464–3519).
- 478 *cassidony*: chalcedony is a semi-transparent white quartz, which forms the third foundation of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:19, and is associated in the medieval lapidaries with authority.
- 480 *saphirs*: the most precious of all jewels in the lapidaries; they were a token of truth and constancy.
- 482 *Ynde*: India was, to the medieval imagination, the extreme limit of remoteness, as well as a symbol of fabulous splendor.
- 499 *tappet*: a piece of figured cloth used as a hanging over a door or doorway.
- 507 *chaunceler*: In medieval households, the chancellor was a very important official who supervised the running of the household and the estate.
- 523 *In taberd wyse*: The reference is to the *tabard*, the short sleeveless tunic (originally simply two panels of cloth joined over the shoulders) emblazoned

### Notes

with armorial bearings, worn by heralds; but clearly the phrase here describes the development of the late fifteenth-century surcoat (see *FL* 141n) with wide openings below the arms and long hanging sleeves.

- 526–30 The hems of the garment were studded with rows of pearls instead of ermine fur, and ‘powdered’ (sprinkled, a heraldic term) with diamonds instead of little black ermine tails. The details of Lady Loyalty’s costume-decoration are very close to what can be seen in paintings of the mid to late fifteenth century, especially from Flanders, and what can be deduced from wills and inventories of the time.
- 533 *serpe*: a serpentine collar or neck-ring of precious metal, chased out or engraved, and set with white enamel flowers, each with a ruby in the center. Charles of Orléans had a similar collar.
- 536 *balays of entaile*: a balas ruby (a delicate rose-red variety of the spinel ruby), with an engraved design, set in the front of the diadem.
- 665 Proverbial.
- 681 *youre*: Lady Loyalty addresses the narrator.
- 689 *seynt Jame*: St. James (the Greater), brother of St. John the Evangelist. His shrine at Compostella in northwestern Spain was the greatest place of Christian pilgrimage in the Middle Ages.
- 694 The narrator’s ‘bill’ is the only one of which we hear the exact words, as it is read out by the secretary.
- 720 *parlement*: The same distinction between an *assembly* (see 752), for the preliminary hearing of complaints, and a *parliament*, to pass judgment and enact laws, seems to be made in *The Isle of Ladies* 1967–72.
- 720–28 The postponed judgment is a frequent convention in poems involving an assembly or debate (e.g., *The Owl and the Nightingale*, *The Parliament of Fowls*), though of course it was common enough in real life, in law as in politics.

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- 736 *water*: Skeat suggested that the water was thrown in her face by her companion to wake her up; this seems rather drastic. Perhaps the spray from the fountain caught her face as her head nodded in sleep. Poets exercise considerable ingenuity in waking their dream-narrators from sleep.
- 740 *this booke*: She seems to move momentarily outside the fiction of oral retelling of her story, as happens not uncommonly in medieval narrative.
- 743 The lady's story (29–742) ends here, and the knight or squire who originally accosted her (line 15) speaks.
- 756 Punctuation here obliges an editor to decide that the narrator turns from her interlocutor to her reader. Cf. the ambiguity in 740.

## *The Isle of Ladies*

### *Introduction*

There are two manuscripts of *The Isle of Ladies* (IL): Longleat House MS 256, of the mid-sixteenth century, and British Library MS Additional 10303, somewhat later. The original composition of the poem probably dates back to late in the previous century. The poem was picked up by Thomas Speght, from a copy not very distant from Addit.10303, and included in his 1598 edition of *The Workes of Geffrey Chaucer*, where, tendentiously and unluckily called *Chaucer's Dreame*, it accompanied *The Floure and the Leafe* (FL) into the Chaucer canon. It remained in the canon until relegated to the apocrypha in Skeat's 1878 revision of Robert Bell's edition of Chaucer, though Henry Bradshaw had questioned its authenticity as early as 1866. It was Bradshaw, on a visit to Longleat House, who inspected the manuscript and attached a note in which he first gave *IL* its present title. Skeat accepted the title in *Chaucerian and Other Pieces* (1897), and so it became established. He did not include the poem in that volume, as he did *FL* and *AL*, because of its inordinate length.

Of the three early texts, it is accepted that the best is Longleat, though the spelling of that manuscript, even given that it is of the mid-sixteenth century, is that of a maniac. There is also much that is vague, obscure, and confused in the text, but it does not seem impossible that these defects may be the responsibility of the poet, not the scribe. The present text follows that of Jenkins (1980), though I have introduced a few minor changes, and also systematized the spellings *u/v* and *i/j* according to modern practice, simplified initial *ff* as *f*, and followed modern word-division. I am very grateful to Dr. Jenkins for letting me use his edition as copy.

Since *IL* is a long poem and its story, unlike those of *FL* and *AL*, quite complicated, it will be useful to have a brief summary of the narrative:

The dreamer finds himself in a beautiful isle inhabited only by ladies. He is courteously but coolly received by their governess, an older lady, who tells him he will have to leave the isle, though they must wait for confirmation of this from their queen, who is about to return

### *The Isle of Ladies*

from a journey. The queen at this point arrives, accompanied by the dreamer's lady and a knight. She explains the mission she has been on to secure the three magic apples that guarantee her subjects youth, beauty, and happiness, and tells how she found the apples in the hands of the dreamer's lady and was then abducted by the knight. In her distress she was succoured by the lady (with an apple) and then by the knight, now repenting his rashness, and they have brought her safely back to the isle. The knight, asked to explain his conduct, falls into distress into swoon and lamentation. He is gently ministered to by the queen, but with no suggestion that she returns his passion (1-692).

At this point the navy of the God of Love arrives: scorning the flimsy defenses of the isle, he advances upon the queen and her company, and demands why she treats his servant so cruelly. After shooting into her the arrow of love, he moves among the rest of the ladies, paying special attention to the dreamer's lady and recommending the dreamer to her as her servant. Having received a 'bill' from the queen, the God of Love announces that he will be there in the morning to receive the submission of the ladies to his service. The day come, he also requires that the queen and the lady accept the knight and the dreamer into their love and service. With this he leaves. So too does the lady, much to the distress of the dreamer, who jumps into the sea and gets hauled aboard her ship, where he is brought back to life by her promise of love (and an apple). As they are about to land, he wakes up (693-1310).

Falling asleep again, he finds himself back on the isle, where the queen and knight are making plans for their wedding ceremony. The knight returns to his own kingdom to complete his arrangements, but is distressed to find that circumstances do not permit him to do so in time to keep to the date he has promised for his return. In some apprehension he returns five days late, only to find that the whole company of ladies has decided they have been betrayed and that they have given their love to unworthy suitors; they are all resolved to mortify the flesh, keep vigil, and repent unto death. The queen and two-thirds of the company are already dead. The knight stabs himself. All are taken off to be buried in the chapel of an abbey of black nuns in the knight's kingdom. There, in the chapel, a wounded bird is healed by the seed from a plant brought by its fellows. The same plant proves efficacious with the queen and with the knight. All the ladies are re-

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stored to life, the wedding plans reinstated, and the dreamer's lady fetched from her land to complete the celebrations. The noise of the music at his own wedding wakens the dreamer, who prays that his lady may turn his dream into reality (1311-2208).

*IL* was long seen as an occasional poem and was speculatively attached to various betrothals, including those of John of Gaunt, Chaucer, and Henry V. It has been attributed to Lydgate and Sir Richard Roos as well as Chaucer. But in reality nothing is known of its author, except that he is likely to have come from the north midlands, nor of any occasion to which the poem might refer. Nothing indeed needs to be known, since the poem is perfectly transparent as an allegory of sexual repression and fulfillment. It is a dream of male desire, in which the skill of women in deflecting men's sexual drive with 'fayre wordes' (741), enigmatic smiles (883-92), and vague noncommittal promises (642-78), their skill in managing the world of mannered politeness, in which reputation or *name* is everything (see 529, 557, 1666), is overcome by the power of the God of Love, who operates here, as in the *Roman de la Rose*, exclusively to the furtherance of male sexual desire.

This allegory of power and the desire for sexual domination is what drives the poem, but it is softened and blurred with a multitude of subtle touches. For instance, the men of the poem, with the exception of the God of Love and the knight in his one unguarded moment (384), have thoroughly absorbed the rules of reputation — the care for *name*, the fear of slander and social disgrace — that the ladies use to protect their chastity. But more than this, the artificiality, fragility, and unnaturalness of the ladies' seclusion and refusal of love is suggested by the glass walls and elaborate artifice of the island's defenses, with their metal singing-birds and exotic carved flowers (78-84). The God of Love, on the other hand, is associated with real flowers and live singing-birds (707, 714, 952), and his presence seems to restore the natural flowers of the isle (841). The implication, of course, as throughout *Troilus and Criseyde*, is that it is men who know what women really want, though one might accept that there is potentially more to the contrast than this — something of what Yeats hinted at in *Byzantium* ('Miracle, bird or golden handiwork / . . . . . scorn aloud / In glory of changeless metal / Common bird or petal / And all complexities of mire and blood'). The symbolism of birds and flowers is carried through into the startlingly beautiful climactic episode of the poem, where the bird that has been wounded (significantly enough in trying to escape through the chapel window), is brought back to life by the seeds from a miraculously rapidly growing plant provided by its fellow

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(1864). It does not take much ingenuity to trace here the contrast between artificial and unnatural restraint and the life-giving force of natural love and compassion. There is an earlier suggestion of this at a key moment in the poem, when the queen is ministering to the distressed knight: she remains cool and noncommittal enough, in the way she feels ladies must, but there is 'a looke peteus / Of wamanhed' (675-76) that she bestows upon him which does not seem part of her strategy, and which might be taken as just that opening of the heart to pity and love which *enables* the God of Love to make his entrance, as he does at this very moment.

Not everything in the poem is done so felicitously, and an unsympathetic inquiry would turn up lots of loose ends in the narrative. But in another respect, that is, in the presentation of the 'I' of the narrative, the poet has been very successful. The success is achieved by playing off two techniques of self-presentation one against the other. The first technique is to suggest a stumbling earnestness about the dreamer, and a desire that the audience should re-live with him his experiences (e.g., 36-42). His emotions are always overflowing into the narrative: the fear that creeps about his heart at his situation on the isle (257-62), his delight at seeing his lady made so much of (453), his excitement at the arrival of the God of Love's navy (705), his anxiety when the God of Love recommends him to his lady, fearing that she will think he has been talking to everyone (863), and his frank delight at the 'loaves and fishes' miracle of the embarkation (1560). At the very end of the poem, the translation of the 'Go little book' formula into an apostrophe to his own heart gives to the poem, instead of sealing it off as a 'book,' an urgent unfinished personal life. On the other hand, there is also a carelessly sophisticated mock-naiveté about the dreamer which makes us wonder, as we wonder with Chaucer, whether we have been taken in. There is self-conscious play with the conventions of the dream-poem, especially in the poem's prologue, where the recognition that he is having his dream at the time lovers conventionally have their dreams (54-55), the commendation of waking visions (like his) over dreams (43-59), and the demand that his rude style be tolerated (64), all stimulate our awareness of the artifice of the form. There is some humor too in the representation of the dreamer's experience, behavior, and reactions: not many will resist a smile when he is fished out of the water with boat-hooks after floundering out to his lady's boat (1159), nor when he describes his joy as being so great that all his bones desired to dance (1200-02). There are also moments when the dreamer stands momentarily outside the conventions of allegory or indeed of narrative itself, as when he explains, within the narrative, the exact allegorical significance of the ship the knight embarks in (1373), or refuses to reveal what he

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and his lady said in secret (1251-66). It is all a trifle brittle, and it is not Chaucer, but it gives a vitality to a form which is usually thought to have been on the point of exhaustion.

The poem's major weakness is the thinness of its stylistic texture and the diffuseness and vapidity of its syntax. Diffuseness is characteristic of medieval poetry written within the conventions of oral delivery, and it has its function, but there are degrees of diffuseness, and in *IL* there is remarkably little in the way of allusion, ornamentation, or metaphor to sustain poetic interest, and almost no power of visualization. As for the poet's sentences, it could be said, not uncharitably, that they operate not so much to drive towards a chosen meaning as to pump out clouds of verbiage that, it is hoped, will precipitate here and there as sense. It could be regarded as a poetic idiom of a kind, and it is certainly not unfamiliar to those who know Lydgate's systematically and self-consciously inflationary poetic techniques.

*IL* is different in many ways from *FL* and *AL*. It is not told by a woman-narrator, nor does it purport to be by a woman, and it has much more to do with the genre of romance, especially romances of Celtic origin such as the Breton *lais* of Marie de France (see e.g., 7ln, 340n, 1505n, 1864n), than those poems. But it makes an excellent complement to *FL* and *AL* in discussions of the fate of late medieval allegory and of the relationships between the sexes that are therein shadowed forth.

## *The Isle of Ladies*

	When Flora, the Quene of Pleasaunce, Had hol achieved th' obessiaunce Of the freshe and new season Thorowte every region, And withe her mantell hol covert That winter made had discovert, Of aventure, without light, In May I lay uppon a nyght Allone, and on my lady thowght And how the Lord that her wrought Couthe well entayle in imagerye <sup>1</sup> And shewed had great masterye When he in so little space Made suche a body and a face: So great beawty, with suche features, More then in other creatures.	<i>wholly; submission</i>
5		<i>entirely covered</i>
	What winter had laid bare By chance	
10		
15		
		<i>than</i>
20		
		<i>natural disposition</i>
25		
		<i>And [I] began like</i>
30		
		<i>belief</i>
		<i>mysterious mode of conveyance</i>
		<i>Bore</i>

<sup>1</sup> Certainly knew how to carve a sculpted image

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	But wether it were I woke or slept, Well wot I oft I laught and wepte. Wherefor I woll in remembraunce Put hole the paine and the pleasaunce	Well I know; laughed will Recall all both fever and health
35	Whiche was to me axes and heale. Wold God ye wiste it every dele! Or at the least ye might on night Of suche another have a syght.	Would to God; knew; bit at night
40	Althowghe it were to yow a Payne, Yet, on the morrowe, ye wold be fayne And wishe it might longe duer. Then might you saye ye had good eure!	glad last fortune thinks; sees
45	For who that dremes and wenes he see, Muche the better yet may hee Wit what, and of home, and where, And eke the lesse it wol him deare.	Know; of whom also; trouble saw; eyes Indeed
50	To thinke I se thus withe myne eyne! Iwys this may no dreme bene, But signe or signiffiaunce Of hasty thinge, soundinge pleasaunce. <sup>1</sup>	in this manner heard nor fully asleep
55	For on this wise uppon a nyght, As ye have hard, witheout light, Not all wakynge ne full on slepe, Abowte suche houre as lovers wepe	cry out for wondrous adventure all the manner of it
60	And cry after ther ladies grace, Befell me this wonder case Whiche ye shall here and all the wise As holly as I cane devise	fully; can badly written sleep(y) writer; know amiss than one
65	In playne Englishe, evell writton; For slepe wrightter, well ye weten, Excused is, thowghe he do mise, More then on that wakinge is.	lack of polish
	Wherefor, here, of your gentulnes I you requier my boysteousnes Ye let passe as thinge rude, And hereth what I woll conclude;	

<sup>1</sup> Of an unforeseen matter having to do with pleasure

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	And of th' enditinge takethe no hede, Ne of the termes, so God you sped, But let all passe as nothinge were: For thus befell as ye shall here.	<i>art of composition take rhetorical figures; prosper as if it were of no account</i>
70		<i>isle gate</i>
	Withein an ylle me thowght I was Where wall and yate was all of glasse, And so was closed rounde abowte That leveles non come in ne owt: Uncothe and straunge to beholde.	<i>without permission; came Unfamiliar</i>
75	For every yate of fine golde A thousannd fannes ay turninge Entuned had, and birdes singinge Diverse, and on eche fanne a payer Withe open mouthe agayne th' ayer.	<i>weather-vanes always Made to sound in tune together</i>
	And of a suite were all the towers Sotilly carven after flowers Of uncothe colours, duringe aye, That never been none sene in May,	<i>pair to meet the air in the same fashion</i>
80	Withe many a smale turret highe. But mane on lyve culd I non spye, Ne creatures save ladyes playe, Wiche were suche of ther arraye That, as me thowght, of godlyhed	<i>Cleverly carved like strange; lasting ever none of them</i>
85	They passen all and womanhed. For to beholde hem daunce and singe Hit semed like none earthly thinge, Suche was ther uncoth countenaunce In every playe of right usaunce. <sup>1</sup>	<i>a living man</i>
90	And of one age everychon They semed all, save only one Wiche had of yeres sufficaunce;	<i>in fine appearance surpass</i>
95	For she might neyther singe ne daunce, But yet her countenaunce was as glad As she as few yeres had hadd As any lady that was there;	<i>demeanor</i>
100		<i>the same</i>
		<i>sufficiency</i>

<sup>1</sup> According to correct custom

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	And as litle it did her dere Of lustines to laugh and tale As she had full stuffed a male Of disport and new playes.	put out pleasure; tell stories bag fun; games
105	Fayre had she been in her dayes, And mistres semed well to be Of all that lusty compayne; And so she might, I you ensure,	mistress pleasure-loving assure <i>one of the wisest of creatures</i>
110	For on the coningest creature She was, and so sayd everychone That ever her knew, ther fayled none; For she was sobre and well avised,	not one disagreed very judicious kept hidden practised
115	And from every fault disguysed, And nothinge used but faythe and trothe. That she nas younge hit was great routhe, For everywhere and in eche place	was not; pity
120	She governed her, that in grace She stod alwaye withe pore and riche, That, in a word, was none her liche, Ne halfe so able misteres to be	like mistress
125	To suche a lustye company. Byfell me so, when I avised Had the yle, at me sufficed, And hol th' astate everywhere	surveyed that <i>all the state of things</i>
130	That in that lusty yle was there, Wiche was more wonder to devise Then the joieux paradise, I dare well say; for flower, ne tree,	conceive joyful nor
135	Ne thinge wherein pleassaunce myght be, Ther fayled none for every wighte; Had thay desyred day and nyghte Richesse, hele, beauwty, and ease,	creature
	Withe everye thinge that hem might please, Thynke, and have, hit cost no more. In suche a countrye there before Had I not been, ne hard tell	health
	That lyves creature might dwell. And when I had thus all abowght	<i>Think of it and you had it</i> heard living about

*The Isle of Ladies*

- 140 The yle advised thorowghte  
 The state and how they were arrayed,  
 In my harte I wex well payed,  
 And in my self I me assured  
 That in my body I was well eured,  
 145 Sithe I might have suche a grace  
 To se the ladyes and the place  
 Wiche were so fayer, I you ensure,  
 That to my dome, thowghe that nature  
 Wold ever strive and do hir Payne,  
 150 She shuld not con ne mowe attaigne  
 The lest feature to amende;  
 Thowgh she wold all hir coninge spende  
 That to beawty might availe,  
 Hit were but Payne and lost travayle:  
 155 Suche parte in ther nativite  
 Was hem alarged of beawtie.  
 And eke they had a thinge notable  
 Unto ther deathe ay durable,  
 And was that ther beawte shuld dure,  
 160 Wiche was never seen in creature;  
 Save only ther, as I trowe,  
 Hit hathe not be wist ne know.  
 Wherefore I praise with ther coninge  
 That duringe bewte, riche thinge;  
 165 Had thay been of ther lyves certaigne,  
 Thay had been qwyd of every Payne.  
  
 And when I wend thus all have seen,  
 Th' estate, the riches, that might been,  
 That me thowght impossible were  
 To se one thinge more then was there  
 That to beautie or glad coninge  
 170 Serve or avayle might ony thinge,  
 All sodenly, as I there stode,  
 This lady, that couth so moche good,  
 Unto me come withe smilinge chere  
 And sayd: 'Benedicite! This yere  
 175  
 surveyed thoroughly  
 condition of things  
 became well pleased  
 in luck  
 Since  
 in my judgment  
 make her greatest effort  
 be able nor have power to  
 least  
 skill  
 labor  
 generously granted  
 And that was; last  
 believe  
 Where it; been known  
 enduring  
 released from  
 thought; to have seen  
 pleasing skill  
 any  
 knew  
 Bless ye!

*The Isle of Ladies*

	Saw I never man here but you. Tell me how ye come hether nowe, And your name, and were you dwell, And whom ye sek eke mot ye tell, And how ye come be to this place. The soth well told may cause you grace; And else ye mote prisoner be Unto these ladyes here and me That han the governaunce of this yle.'	<i>hither</i> <i>where</i> <i>must</i>  <i>truth</i>
180	And so dyd all the lusty rowte Of ladyes that stode her abowte. 'Madame,' quod I, 'this night paste, Lodged I was and slepte faste In a forest beside a well, And nowe ame here. How shuld I tell? Wot I not by whos ordinaunce, But only Fortunes purveaunce Wiche puttes many, as I gesse, To travell, payne, and busines, And lettes nothinge for ther trowth But some sleethe eke, and that is rowth; Wherefore I dowt hir britelnes, Hir variaunce and unstedfastnes, So that I am as yet affrayd And of my beinge here amayed; For wondre thinge, semethe me, Thus many freshe ladyes to see, So fayer, so connynge, and so yonge, And no mane dwellethe hem amonge. Wot I not how I hether come, Madame,' quod I, 'this all and some. <sup>1</sup> What shuld I feyne a longe processe To you that seme suche a princes? What please you comaunde or saye, Here I am you to obeye	<i>company</i>  <i>whose command</i> <i>forward planning</i>  <i>labor</i> <i>spares</i> <i>slays; pity</i> <i>fear; mutability</i>  <i>frightened</i> <i>dismayed</i>  <i>clever</i> <i>man</i> <i>hither</i>  <i>invent; story</i>
185		
190		
195		
200		
205		
210		

<sup>1</sup> 'Madam,' I said, 'This is the long and short of it'

*The Isle of Ladies*

- 215 To my power, and all fulfill,  
And prisoner byde at your will  
Till you dewlye enformed be  
Of everye thinge ye aske me.' *properly*  
This lady ther right well appayed  
Me by th' ande toke and sayd:  
'Welcome, prisoner adventurus!' *pleased*  
*hand*  
*unexpected*
- 220 Right glad am I ye have sayd thus.  
And for ye doute me to displease,  
I will assaye to do you ease.' *fear*  
And with that word, ye anon,  
She and the ladyes everychone  
Assembled and to counsell went;  
And after that, sone for me sent,  
And to me sayd on this maner,  
Word for word as ye shall here.
- 230 'To se you here us thinketh marvayle,  
And how witheout boot or sayle  
By any sountyllete or wyle  
Ye get have entre in this Ile.  
But not for that, yet shall you see  
That we gentilwomen bee,  
Lothe to displease any wight,  
Notwithstandinge our great right.  
And for ye shall well understand  
The old custome of this lande  
Wiche hathe continewed many yere,  
Ye shall well wyt that withe us here  
Ye may not byd, for causes twayne  
Wheche we be purposed you to seyne. *seems to us a marvel*  
*boat*  
*trickery*  
*have got entry*  
*nevertheless*  
*stay*  
*say*
- 240 The ton is this: our ordinaunce,  
Whiche is of longe continuance,  
Woll not, sothely we you tell,  
That no mane here amonge us dwell;  
Wherefore ye mot nedes retorne.  
In no weys may ye here sojorne. *The one*  
*of great antiquity*  
*Desires*  
*must*  
*way; remain*

*The Isle of Ladies*

	The tother is eke that our qwene	<i>The other</i>
250	Owt of the reme, as ye may sene,	<i>realm</i>
	Is, and may be to us a charge	<i>it may; harm</i>
	Yf we let you go here at large.	
	For wiche cause, the more we dowbte	
	To do a faute while she is owte,	<i>fault</i>
255	Or suffer that may be noysaunce	<i>what; harm</i>
	Again our olde acustemaunce.'	<i>Against; custom</i>
	And when I had these causes tweine	
	Herd, O God, whiche a Payne	<i>Heard; what</i>
	All sodenly abowte my harte	
260	Ther come attons, and how smerte!	<i>at once; painfully</i>
	In crepinge soft, as who wold stelle	<i>as if someone</i>
	Or me do robe of all myn hele;	<i>have robbed me; well-being</i>
	And made me in my thought so frayd	<i>afraid</i>
	That in corage I stode dismayed.	<i>spirit</i>
265	And standinge thus, as was my grace,	
	A lady come, more then apas,	<i>quite quickly</i>
	Withe huge pres hir abowte,	<i>throng</i>
	And told how the quene withoute	
	Was arryved and wold come in.	
270	Wele were thay that thether might wyn;	<i>Happy; thither</i>
	They hied so, they wold not byde	<i>hastened</i>
	The bridelinge of ther horse to ryde.	
	By ten, by six, by two, by thre,	
	Ther was not one abode with me.	<i>stayed</i>
275	The quene to mete, everychone	
	They went, and bod withe me not one.	<i>stayed</i>
	And I after, a softe paas,	<i>at a gentle pace</i>
	Imageninge how to purchace	
	Grace of the quene ther t' abyde,	
280	Till good fortune some happy guyde	<i>carried away; dwelling</i>
	Me send might, that wold me bringe	<i>path</i>
	Where I was borne to my woninge;	
	For way ne sent knew I none,	<i>did not know</i>
	Ne whetherward I nyst to gone,	
285	For all was see abouthe the Ile.	<i>sea</i>

*The Isle of Ladies*

- No wonder thowghe me lest not smyle,  
Seinge the case unquowth and straunge  
And so like a perelus chaunge.  
Imageninge thus, walkinge allone,  
290 I saw the ladyes everychone.  
So that I myght somwhat ofer,  
Sone after that I drew me neare.  
And tho I was war of the quene,  
295 And how the ladyes on there knene  
Withe joyeuse wordes, gladly avised,  
Hir welcomed, so that hit sufficed  
Thoghe she princes hole had bee  
Of all that vironed is withe see.  
300 And thus avisinge with chere sadd,  
All sodenlye I wex gladd,  
That greater joye, as mot I thrive,  
I trow had never mon on lyve  
Then had I tho, ne harte more light,  
When of my lady I had syght  
305 Wiche withe the quene come was there.  
And in one clothinge bothe they were.<sup>1</sup>  
A knyght also, right wel besene,  
I sawe, that come was with the quene;  
Of whom the ladyes of that Ile  
310 Had huge wonder longe whyle,  
Till at the last, right soberlye  
The quene herselfe full coninglye  
With softe wordes, in goodlyc wyse,  
Sayd to the ladyes yonge and wyse:  
315 'My susters, how hit hathe befall,  
I trow ye know it, on and all,  
That of longe tyme here have I been  
Withein this yle bydinge as quene,  
Lyvinge at ease, that never wight  
320 More perfyte joye have ne mighte;
- I had no wish to  
unfamiliar  
offer  
then  
knees  
devised  
entirely  
surrounded  
looking on; gloomy  
became  
may  
believe; alive  
Than; then  
very well trimmed out  
wisely*

<sup>1</sup> *They were both in the same style of clothing*

*The Isle of Ladies*

	And to you been of governaunce Suche as ye fond in hol pleasaunce In every thinge, as ye knowe, After our costome and our lowe.	<i>in my way of governing found entirely satisfying law</i>
325	Wiche how they first found were, I trow ye wote all the manere And how who quene is of this Ile — As I have bene longe while —	<i>believe; know</i>
330	Yche seven yeres mot of usage Visyt the hevenly armitage, Wiche on a roche so highe stondes In strange se, out from all londes,	<i>must; ancient custom hermitage</i>
335	That to make the pilferenage Is caled a longe perileuse viage; For yf the winde be not good frind, The journey duers to th' ende	<i>pilgrimage</i>
	Of hem that hit undertakes: Of twenti thousands one not skapes.	<i>journey</i>
340	Oppon whiche roche growethe a tree That certayne yeres bares apples three, Wiche thre apples who may have Bene from all displeasaunce save	<i>friend</i>
	That in the seven yere may fall. This wote ye well, one and all.	<i>lasts</i>
345	For the first appull, and the hexst Whiche growethe unto you nexst, Hathe thre vertues notable And kepethe youthe ay durable,	<i>Upon</i>
	Bewtie and hele ever in one, And is the beste in everychone.	<i>whoever</i>
350	The second appule, red and grene, Only with lokes of your yene You nurrisshes in pleasaunce Better then partrich ne fesaunce,	<i>safe</i>
355	And fedes every lyves wyght Plesauntlye with the syght. The thirde appule of the thre, Wiche growethe loueste in the tree,	<i>highest</i>
		<i>everlasting health ever the same</i>
		<i>looks; eyes</i>
		<i>pheasants living creature</i>
		<i>lowest</i>

*The Isle of Ladies*

- 360 Who yt beres may not fayle  
 That to his pleasaunce may availe. *Whatever*  
 So your pleasure and beutie riche,  
 Your duringe youthe ever liche,  
 Your trothe, your coninge, and your welle,  
 Hathe ay flowred, and your good hele  
 Witheout sicknes or displesaunce  
 Or thinge that to you was noysaunce,  
 So that you have as goddesses  
 Lived aboven all princesses.
- 370 Now is byfall as ye may see:  
 To gedre these sayd appuls three,  
 I have not fayled agayne the daye  
 Thetherward to take the weye,  
 Weninge to sped, as I had oft;  
 But when I come, I found aloft  
 375 My sister wiche that here stondes,  
 Havinge those appulles in her handes,  
 Avisinge hem, and nothinge sayde  
 But loked as she wer well payed.  
 And as I stode her to behold,  
 380 Thenkinge howe my joyes were cold  
 Sithe I those apples have ne might,  
 Even withe that, so come this knight,  
 And in his armes, of me unaware,  
 Me toke, and to his shipe me bare,  
 385 And sayd, thowgh he me never had sene,  
 Yet had I longe his lady bene,  
 Wherefore I shuld withe him wend,  
 And he wolde to his lives ende  
 My seruaunte be, and can to singe  
 390 As one that had wone riche thinge.  
 Tho were my spirites fro me gone  
 So sodenlye, everychone,  
 That in me appered but deathe;  
 For I feld neyther live, ne brethe,  
 395 Ne good, ne harme, non I knewe.
- lasting; ever the same  
wisdom; well-being  
happiness*
- a harm*
- To gather these same  
against (upon)*
- Thinking to have success*
- Looking at them  
pleased*
- to me unexpectedly  
carried off*
- go*
- began*
- Then*
- felt; life*

*The Isle of Ladies*

- The sodeyne paine me was so new,  
That had not the hasty grace be  
Of this lady, that fro the tree  
Of her gentulnes so hiede  
400 Me to comforthe, I had dyed;  
And of her three applus, one  
In myn hand ther put annone,  
Wiche browght agayne minde and brethe,  
And me recovered from the deathe.  
405 Wherefore to her so am I holde  
That for her all thinge do I wolde;  
For she was leche of all my smart,  
And from great paine socourte myn harte,  
And, as God wotte, right as ye here,  
410 Me to comforte, with frindlye chere  
She did her power and her might;  
And trewlye eke so did this knight,  
In that he couthe, and oft sayd  
That of my woo he was il payed,  
415 And cursed the shipe hem thether browght,  
The mast, the master that hit wrought.  
And as eche thinge mot have an ende,  
My suster here, our brother frinde,  
Con withe her wordes so womanlye  
420 This knyght entreat and coningelye,  
For myn honour and his also,  
And sayd that with her we shuld goo  
Bothe in her shippe, where she was browght,  
Wiche was so wonderfullye wrought,  
425 So clene, so riche, and so arrayed  
That we were bothe content and payed.  
And me to comfort and to plesse,  
And myn hart to put at easse,  
She toke great Payne in litle while,  
430 And thus hathe browght us to this Ile  
As ye maye se. Wherefore echone  
I praye you thanke her, one and one,  
As hertelye as ye cane devise
- immediate help been*  
*beholden*  
*physician; hurt*  
*relieved*  
*knows*  
*friendly*  
*In whatever*  
*ill pleased*  
*the ship that*  
*must*  
*Began*  
*skillfully*  
*wherein*  
*one after another*

*The Isle of Ladies*

Or imagen in any wyse.'

- 435 At once ther, tho, men myght sene  
A world of ladyes fall on knene *knees*  
Before my lady, that ther abowte  
Was left none stanndinge in the route, *company*  
Bot all to th' erthe they went at once;  
440 To knele they spared not for the stones,  
Ne for estate, ne for ther blode. *their high birth*
- Well shewed they ther they cuthe moche good,<sup>1</sup>  
For to my lady they made such feaste,  
With such wordes, that the leste *least*  
445 So frindlye and so faythefullye  
Sayd was, and so coninglye,  
That wonder was, seinge ther youthe,  
To here the launguage they cothe,  
And holly how they governed were *had command of  
conducted themselves*
- 450 In thannkyng of my ladye there;  
And sayd by will and maundement *command*  
They were at her comandemente,  
Wiche was to me as great a joye  
As wininge of the towne of Troye
- 455 Was to the hardye Grekes stronge  
When thay yt wane with seage longe: *won; siege*  
To se my ladye in such a place  
So receyved as she was.
- 460 And when they taled had a while *talked*  
Of this and that, and of the Ile,  
My lady and the ladyes there,  
All together as they were,  
The quene herselfe begane to playe, *speak playfully*
- 465 And to the aged lady saye:  
'Now semethe you nat good it were,<sup>2</sup>  
Sith we be all togither here, *Since*

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<sup>1</sup> *They well exemplified there that they knew exactly what was right*

<sup>2</sup> *Now doesn't it seem to you it would be a good idea*

*The Isle of Ladies*

	To ordayne and avise the best To set this knyght and me at rest?	devise
470	For woman is a feble wyght To rere a ware agayne a knyght. And sith he here is in this place At my lyst, daunger or grace, <sup>1</sup> It were in me great villanye To do him any tirrannyne.	person raise a war discourtesy
475	But fayne I wolde now, will ye here, In his owne cunterye that he were, And I in peace, and he at ease; This were a waye us bothe to please. Yf yt might be, I you beseche	
480	Withe him hereof ye fall in speche.'	
	This lady tho began to smyle, Avisinge her a littull whille, And withe glad chere she sayd annon; 'Madame, I will unto him gone	Considering within herself
485	And withe him speke, and of him fele What he desyers, everye dele.'	detect every bit
	And soberlye this lady tho, Herselfe and other ladyes two	
490	She toke withe her, and with sad chere Sayd to the knyght on this maner: 'Syr, the princesse of this Ile, Whom for your pleasaunce many myle	with a serious face in
	Ye sowght have, as I understand, Till at the last ye have her found,	
495	Me sende hathe here, and ladyes twayne, To here all thinge that ye sayne, And for what cause ye have her sowght, Fayne wold she wyt, and hole your thought,	sent say know, and all cause
	And whi you do her all this woo,	
500	And for what cause ye be her foo, And whi, of everye wight unaware, By force ye to your shippe her bare	enemy unbeknown

<sup>1</sup> According to my pleasure, [whether it be] disdain or favor

*The Isle of Ladies*

	That she so nyghe was agone That minde ne speche had she none,	<i>was so nearly distracted</i>
505	But as a paynefull creature Diinge abode her adventure, That her to se enduer that payne, I dare well saye unto you playne, Right on yourselfe ye did amise, 510 Seeinge how she a princes is.'	<i>full of sorrow</i> <i>awaited her fate</i>
	This knyght, the whiche couth his good, Ryght of his trothe meved his blood, That pale he wox as any ledd And loked as he wold be dedd.	<i>in</i>
515	Blud was ther none in nayther cheke; Wordles he was, and semed sike; And so yt preved well he was, For without mevinge any passe, All sodenlye, as thinge dyinge,	<i>knew what was good for him</i> <i>drained (from his face)</i> <i>lead</i>
	He fell at once downe sowninge; That, for his wo, this lady frayed Unto the quene her hied and sayd: 'Comethe on, anone, as have ye blisse! But be ye wyse, thinge is misse.	<i>moving a step</i>
520	This knyght is ded or wil be sone; Lo, where he lyethe yonde in sowne, Without word or answeringe To that I sayd have any thinge! <sup>1</sup>	<i>swooning</i> <i>afraid</i>
	Wherefore I dowbte that the blame Might be hinderinge to your name, Whiche flowred hathe so many yere So longe, that for nothinge here	<i>she hurried</i>
525	I wold in no wyse he dyedd.	<i>as you may have</i> <i>Unless; amiss</i>
	Wherefore good were that ye hiedd His lyfe to save, at the lest;	<i>swoon</i>
530	And after that his woo be ceste, Commaunde him to voyd or dwell, For in no wyse dare I more medell	<i>it would be good</i>
		<i>ceased</i> <i>depart</i> <i>meddle</i>

<sup>1</sup> *To anything that I have said*

*The Isle of Ladies*

- 540      Of thinge wherein suche perill is  
                As lyke is now to fall of this.'
- 545      This quene right tho, full of great feare,  
                Withe all the ladyes present there,  
                Unto the knyght come where he leye  
                And mad a lady to him saye:  
                'Lo, here the quene! Awacke, for shame!  
                What will ye do? Is this good game?  
                Whi lye you here? Where is your minde?  
                Now is well sene your wyt is blinde,  
                To see so many ladyes here,  
550      And ye to make none other chere  
                But as ye sett them all at nowght.  
                Aryse, for His love that you bowght!'  
                But what she sayed, a word not one  
                He spake, ne answere gave her none.
- 555      The quene of very ptyte tho,  
                Her worshippe and his life also  
                To save, ther she dyd her payne,  
                And quocke for fere and con to sayne  
                For woo: 'Allas, what shall I do?  
560      What shall I saye this man unto?  
                Yf he dye here, lost is my name.  
                How shall I pleye this perilous game?  
                Yf any thinge be here amise,  
                Yt shal be sayd hit rigor is,  
565      Whereby my name empayer myght,  
                And like to dye eke is this knyght.'  
                And withe that word, her hande she layed  
                Upon his brest, and to him sayed:  
                'Awacke, my knyght! Lo, yt am I  
570      That to you speke! Now tell me whi  
                Ye fare thus and this payne enduer,  
                Seinge ye be in counterye suer,  
                Amonge suche frindes that wold your hele,  
                Your hartes ease eke, and your welle;  
575      And yf I wyst what you might ease
- redeemed*  
*whatever*
- exerted herself*  
*quaked; and said*
- cruelty is*  
*might be injured*
- a safe country*  
*desire your well-being*

*The Isle of Ladies*

- Or knew the thinge that you might please,  
 I you ensuer it shulde not fayle  
 That to youre hele you might avayle. *Whatever*  
 Wherefore with all myne harte I praye  
 580      Ye rysse, and lett us tale and pleye,  
 And see how many ladyes here  
 Be common for to make you chere.' *rise; converse*  
*Are come*
- All was for nawght; for still as stone  
 He laye, and worde spake he none.  
 585      Longe while was or he might brayd,  
 And of all that the quene had sayd  
 He wyst no worde; but at the last,  
 'Mercy' twies he cried faste,  
 That pyty was his voice to here  
 590      Or to beholde his paynefull chere,  
 Wiche was not fayned, well was to sene  
 Bothe by his visage and his eyne  
 Wiche on the quene at once he caste,  
 And syghte as he wolde to-braste.  
 595      And after that he shright soo  
 That wonder was to se his woo;  
 For sythe that paine was first named  
 Was never more woofull paine entamed,  
 For withe voice ded he gan to playne,  
 600      And to himselfe these wordes sayne:  
 'I, woofull wyght full of maleure,  
 Am worse then ded, and yet I duer  
 Magre any payne or deathe;  
 Agaynst my will I fele my brethe.  
 605      Whi ner I ded, sythe I ne serve  
 And sythe my lady will I sterve?  
 Where art thou, deathe? Art thou agast?  
 Well shall we mete yet at the laste!  
 Thowghe thou the hide, it is for nawght;  
 610      For, where thou dwell, thou shall be sought,  
 Magre thi subtill dowble face;  
 Here will I dye, right in this place,
- ere; stir*
- as could clearly be seen*  
*eyes*
- sighed; burst*  
*shrieked*
- since*  
*revealed*  
*dead*
- misfortune*  
*endure*  
*Despite*
- Why should I not be dead*  
*wishes that I die*
- Despite*

*The Isle of Ladies*

- To thi dishonour and myn ease.  
 Thi manner is no wyght to please. *practise; creature*
- 615 What nedes the, sythe I the seche,  
 So the to hide, my paine to eche?  
 And well wanst thou I woll not lyve — *increase*  
 Who wolde me all this world here gefe — *Even if someone; give*  
 For I have withe my cowardice  
 Lost joye, and helle, and my service, *well-being*  
 And made my soveraigne lady soo,  
 That while she lyves, I trow, my foo  
 She wil be ever to her ende.  
 Thus have I neyther joye ne frend. *believe*
- 620 Wote I not whither hast or slowthe  
 Hathe caused this now, by my trothe;  
 For at the hermitage full hye,  
 Where I her saw first withe myn eye,  
 I hyed till I was alofte, *hastened*  
 625 And mad my pace smale and softe,  
 Till in myn armes I had her faste,  
 And to my shipe bare at the laste;  
 Whereof she was displeased soo  
 That endles there semed her woo,  
 630 And I thereof had so great feare  
 That me repent that I came there;  
 Wiche hast, I trowe, con her displease  
 And be the cause of my deseace.' *short and stealthy*  
 And withe that word he can to crye  
 'Now deathe, deathe!' twy or thrye,  
 A motird wot I not what of slougthe.<sup>1</sup> *I repent*  
 635 And even withe that, the quene, of routhe,  
 Him in her armes tooke and sayd:  
 'Now myn owne knyght, be not yll payed  
 That I a lady to you sente *haste; displeased her*  
 640 To have knowledge of your entent;  
 For, in good faythe, I ment but well,  
 That I a lady to you sente *And was; distress*  
 645 *twice or thrice*  
*for pity*  
*ill pleased*

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<sup>1</sup> *He murmured I know not what (i.e., something inaudible) of dying*

*The Isle of Ladies*

	And wold ye w提醒 yt everye dell, <sup>1</sup> Nor woll not do to you, iwyssse.'	do [any harm]; indeed
650	And withe that word she can him kysse, And prayed him ryse, and sayd she wold His welfare by her trothe, and tolde Him howe she was for his diseace Right sorye, and fayne wold him please.	desired
655	His lyfe to save, thes wordes thoo She sayd to him, and many moo, In comfortinge; for from the peyne She wold he were delyvered fayne. The knight tho upcast his eyne,	these
660	And when he se it was the quene That to him had those wordes sayde, Ryght in his woo he can to brayd <sup>2</sup> And him updressed for to knele, The quene avisinge wonder well.	saw
665	But as he rosse, he over-threw;	prepared
	Wherfore the quene, yet eft newe, Him in her armes annon toke And piteuslye con on him looke.	gazing upon
	But, for all that, nothinge she sayde,	rose; fell over
670	Ne spake not lyke she were well paied, Ne no chere mad more sadd ne lyght, But all in on, to every wyght, Ther was sene connynnge withe estate In her, witheout noyse or debate;	yet once again
675	For, save only a look peteus Of womanehed, undispiteous, That she shewed in countenaunce, Far semed her hart from obeysaunce.	neither more equally combined
	And not for that, she did her paine	politeness with nobility
680	Him to recover from the paine, And his harte to put at large. For her entent was to his barge	free from scorn
		submission notwithstanding that
		set free

<sup>1</sup> And really wanted you to know that

<sup>2</sup> So in the midst of his distress he stirred

*The Isle of Ladies*

- Him to bringe agenst the eve, *towards evening*  
 Withe sertayne ladyes, and take leve,  
 685 And pray him of his gentulnes  
 To suffer her thenceforthe in peace  
 As other princisse had byfore;  
 And from thenseforthe, for evermore,  
 She wold him worshiphe in all wise  
 690 That jentylnes myght devise,  
 And Payne her holly to fulfill,  
 In honor, his pleasure and will.
- And duringe thus the knyghtes woo — *The queen being present*  
 Present the quene and other mo,  
 695 My lady and many another wight —  
 Ten thousand shippes, at a syght,  
 I sawe come over the wavy floude  
 Withe sayle and ore, thatt, as I stoode  
 Them to beholde, I cone marvell  
 700 From whense myght come so many a sayle;  
 For sythe the tyme that I was bore,  
 Suche a navy ther before  
 Had I not sene, ne so arrayed,  
 That for the syght myn hart played  
 705 Two and fro withein my brest *To and fro*  
 Fro joy; longe was or it wold rest.  
 For ther wer sayles full of flowers,  
 Aftercastelles withe huge towers,  
 Seminge full of armes bright,  
 710 That wonder lusty was the syght,  
 Withe large toppes and mastes longe,  
 Richelye depainte; and ever amonge,  
 At certen tymes, con repayer  
 Smale burdes downe from the eyor,  
 715 And on the shippes bordes abowte  
 Sate, and songe withe voice full owt  
 Ballades and leyes, right joyouslye,  
 As they couthe in ther armonye;  
 That you to wright that I ther see,
- allow her [to live]*  
*princes*  
*courtesy; stipulate*
- Stern-castles*  
*coats of arms (weapons?)*  
*invigorating*  
*mast-head platforms*  
*ever and again*  
*made their way*  
*air*  
*planks*  
*full-throated*  
*lays*
- write what; saw*

*The Isle of Ladies*

- 720 Myn excuse is it may not bee;  
 For whi the matter were to longe  
 To name the birdes and wright her songe.  
 Whereof, annon, the thithinges ther  
 Unto the quene sonne browght wer  
 Withe many ‘alas’ and many a doubt,  
 Shewinge the shippes ther without.  
 Tho can the aged lady weppe  
 And sayd, ‘Allas, your joye on slepe  
 Sone shal be browght; ye, long or night!  
 730 For we destroyed bene by this knyght.  
 For certes it may none other be  
 But he is of yened companie,  
 And thay be come him here to seche.’  
 And withe that word her fayled speche.  
 ‘Witheout remedy we be destroyed,’  
 Full ofte sayd all, and con conclude,  
 Holy at once at the laste,  
 That best was shett ther yattes faste,  
 And arme them all in good langauge,  
 740 As they had done of old usage,  
 And of fayre wordes make ther shoot.  
 And this was ther counsell and the knot.  
 And other purpose toke they none,  
 But, armed thus, forthe they gone  
 745 Towarde the walles of the Ile.  
 But or they come ther longe while,  
 They mette the great lord of above  
 That cauled is the God of Love  
 That hem advised withe suche chere  
 750 Right as he withe them angrye were.  
 Avayled them not ther walles of glasse —  
 This mighty lord lett not to passe —  
 Ne shettinge of ther yattes fast.  
 All they had ordayne was but wast;  
 755 For when his shipe had founde londe,  
 This lord anone withe bowe in hande,  
 In to this Ile withe huge presse  
 Because  
 tidings  
 soon  
 Announcing  
 joy to sleep  
 yonder  
 seek  
 to shut; gates  
 ammunition  
 main point  
 called  
 looked at them  
 was not hindered  
 a waste  
 throng

*The Isle of Ladies*

	Hyed fast, and wold not ceasse Tyll he come where this knyght laye.	<i>Hastened</i>
760	Of quene ne ladye by the waye Toke he no hedd, but forthe past — And yet all followed at the laste. And when he come where laye the knight, Well shewed he he had great might,	<i>heed</i>
765	And forthe the quene cauled, anone, And all the ladyes everychone, And to them sayde: 'Is this not rothe To se my servaunte for his trothe Thus lene, thus syke, and in this paine,	<i>a pity</i>
770	And wote not unto home to plaine, Save onlye one, witheout mo, Wiche might him helle and is his foo?' And withe that word, his hevye browe He shewed the quene, and loked rowghe.	<i>whom to complain</i>
775	This mighty lord, forthe tho annone, Withe o loke, her feautes echeon He can her shew in littell speche, Comaunding her to be his leche. Witheout more, shortlye to saye,	<i>heal</i>
780	He thawght the quene sonne shuld obeye. And in his hannd he shoke his bowe, And sayd right sone he wolde be know; And for she had so longe refused His servaunte, and his lawes not used,	<i>fierce</i>
785	He lett her witt that he was wrothe, And bent his bowe, and forthe he goethe A paace or two, and even here A large drawght up to his eare He drew, and withe an arrow ground	<i>faults</i>
790	Sharpe and new, the quene a wounde He gave that pearced unto the harte, Wiche afterward full sore can smarte, And was not holle of many a yere. And even withe that: 'Be of good chere,	<i>in few words</i>
795	My knyght,' quod he. 'I will the hele,	<i>physician</i>
		<i>soon; obey</i>
		<i>acknowledged as lord</i>
		<i>let her know</i>
		<i>sharpened by grinding</i>
		<i>healed for</i>
		<i>heal you</i>

*The Isle of Ladies*

	And the restore to parfyte wele.	<i>well-being</i>
	And for eche Payne thou hast endured,	
	To have two joyes thou ar ewred.'	<i>happily destined</i>
	And forthe he past by the rowte	<i>crowd</i>
800	Withe sobre chere, walkyng aboue,	
	And what he sayd I thowght to here.	
	Well wist he wiche his seruautes were,	<i>knew</i>
	And as he passed, annone he found	
	My lady, and her toke by the hande,	
805	And made her chere as a goddesse,	
	And of beuty he cauled her princesse;	
	Of bountye eke gave her the name,	
	And sayd ther was nothinge blame	<i>to be blamed</i>
	In her but she was vertuus,	
810	Savinge she wolde no pitye use,	
	Wiche was the cause he ther her sawght	
	To put that faute owt of her thawght.	<i>deficiency</i>
	And sythe she had the hole riches	
	Of wamanhed and frendlynes,	
815	He sayd it was nothinge syttinge	<i>appropriate</i>
	To voyd petye his owne lodginge;	<i>thrust out pity from</i>
	And can her preache and wither her playe,	<i>converse lightly</i>
	And of her beawtye tolde her aye,	<i>repeatedly</i>
	And sayd she was a creature	
820	Off whom the name shuld longe dewer	<i>endure</i>
	And in booke full of plesaunce	
	Be put for ever in remembraunce.	
	And as me thowght, more frindlyely	
	Unto my ladye and goodlye	
825	He spake, then any that was ther;	
	And for the apples, I trow yt were,	
	That she had in possession.	
	Wherefor longe in processyon,	
	Many a paace, arme under other,	
830	He walked, and so did with none other.	
	But what he wold comaunde or saye	
	Forthewithe neades all must obeye;	<i>Straightway</i>

*The Isle of Ladies*

- And what he desyred at the least  
Of my ladye, was by requeste.
- 835 And when they longe together had bene,  
He browght my ladye to the quene,  
And to her sayd: 'So God you spede,  
Shew grace, consentes, that is neade.' *needful*
- 840 My ladye, tho, full conninglye,  
Right well avised and womanlye, *Very judicious*  
Downe cone to knele uppon the flores,  
Whiche Aprell nurrisched had with showers,  
And to this mightye lord cane saye,  
'That pleassethe you, I woll obeye' *What*
- 845 And me restraine from other thowght;  
As ye woll, all thinges shal be wrought.'  
And withe that word, knelinge, she qwoke.  
That mightye lord in armes her toke  
And sayd: 'Ye have a sarvaunte, one
- 850 That trewer livinge is ther none;  
Wherefore, god were, seinge his trothe,  
That on his paynes ye had rothe  
And purposed you to here his speche,  
Fullye avised him to leche. *it were good compassion*
- 855 For of one thinge ye may be suer:  
He wil be youres while he may duer.'  
And withe that word, right on his game,  
Me thowght he lowghe and tolde my name,  
Wiche was to me marvell and fere,
- 860 That what to do I nist there,  
Ne whither me was better or none  
Ther to abyde or thence to gone.  
For well wend I my ladye wolde  
Imagen or deme that I had tolde *thought*
- 865 My counsell hole, or made complainte  
Unto that lorde, that mightye saynte;  
So verelye eche thinge unsawght  
He sayd as he had know my thought,  
And tolde my trothe and myn unease *whole secret*
- 870 Bet then I couthe for myn ease, *accurately; unasked known*

*The Isle of Ladies*

- Tho I had studied all a weake. *a whole week*  
 Well wist that lord that I was syke  
 And wold be leched wonder faine.  
 No mane me blame; myne was the paine.  
 875 And when this lord had all sayd  
 And longe withe my ladye playd,  
 She can to smyle withe sprite glade.  
 This was the answere that she mad,  
 Wiche put me there in dowble paine,  
 880 That what to do, ne what to sayne,  
 Wist I not ne what was the best.  
 Fare was myn harte tho from his rest:  
 For as I thowght that smylinge sygne  
 Was token that the hart inclyne  
 885 Wold to request reasonable,  
 By cause smylinge is favorable  
 To every thinge that shall thrive,  
 So thowght I tho, anon belyve,  
 That wordèles answere in no towne  
 890 Was tane for obligacyon,  
 Ne cauled sewertye, in no wyse,  
 Amonges them that cauled bene wise.  
 Thus was I in a joyous doubte,  
 Suer an unsurest of that rowte. *and*  
 895 Right as myn hart thowght it were,  
 So more or lesse woxe my fere,  
 That yf one thowght made it well,  
 Annother shente yt everye deale,  
 Till at the last I couthe no more,  
 900 But porposed, as I dyd before,  
 To serve trewelye my lyves space,  
 Awaytinge ever the yere of grace  
 Wiche may fall yet or I sterue,  
 Yf it please her that I serve,  
 905 And served have, and wil do ever.  
 For thinge is none that me is lever  
 Then her service, whose presence  
 Myn heven is hole, and her absence *grew*  
*the duration of my life*  
*befall; before I die*  
*more precious*  
*Is my whole heaven*

*The Isle of Ladies*

- 910      An hell full of diverse paines  
            Wiche to the deathe full oft me straynes.
- 915      Thus in my thowghtes, as I stode —  
            That unethe felt I harme ne good —  
            I sawe the quene at littell paace  
            Come where this mightye lord was,  
            And kneled downe in presence there  
            Of all the ladyes that ther were,  
            Withe sobre countenance avised,  
            In fewe wordes that well sufficed,  
            And to this lord, annon, pressent  
920      A byll, wherin hol her intente  
            Was writton, and how she besowght,  
            As he knew every will and thought,  
            That of his godhede and his grace  
            He wold forgeve all old trespace,  
            And undispleased be of tyme past,  
            For she wold ever be stedfaste,  
            And, in his service, to the deathe  
            Use every thought wall she had breathe,  
            And syght, and wepte, and sayde no more.  
925      Withein was wrytton all the sore.  
            At wiche bill the lord cane smyle,  
            And sayd he wold withein that Ile  
            Be lord and syr, bothe est and west;  
            And cauled it ther his new conquest,  
            And in great counsell toke the quene.  
930      Longe were the tales them betwene.  
            And over her bill he rede thrise,  
            And wonder gladlye con devise  
            Her features fayer and hir visage,  
935      And bad good thrifte on that image,  
            And sayd he trowed her complaynet  
            Shuld after cause her be corseint<sup>1</sup>  
            And in his sleeve he put the bill —

*hardly  
very slowly*

*well-composed*

*letter; wholly*

*goodness*

*while  
sighed*

*sire*

*gave an account of*

*wished good success*

---

<sup>1</sup> *Should afterward cause her to be [thought of as] a saint*

*The Isle of Ladies*

- Was ther none that knewe his will —  
945 And forthe walked apace abowte,  
Beholdinge all the lustye rowte,  
Halfe in a thowght, withe smylinge chere,  
Till, at the last, as ye shall here,  
He torned unto the quene agayne  
950 And sayd: ‘To morne, here in this playne  
I woll ye be, and all yours  
That purposed bene to were flowers  
Or of my lustye collours use.  
It may not be to you excuse,  
955 Ne none of youres, in no wyse,  
That able be to my service.  
For, as I sayd have here before,  
I woll be lord for evermore  
Of you, and of this Ile and all,  
960 And of all youres that have shall  
Joye, peace, or easse, or in pleasaunce  
Your lives use witheoute mischaunce;  
Here will I in estate be sene’ —  
And turned his visage to the quene —  
965 ‘And you geve knowledge of my will,  
And a full answere of youre bill.’  
Was ther non ‘ney,’ ne wordes none,  
But very obeysaunt semed eche one,  
Quene and other that were there.  
970 Well semed yt they had great feare.  
And toke lodginge every wyght;  
Was none departed of that night.  
And some to reade old romansys  
Hem occupied for ther pleasaunces,  
975 Some to make virleyes and leyes,  
And some to other diverse pleyes.  
And I to me a romaunse toke,  
And as I readinge was the booke,  
Me thowght the spere had so rone  
980 That it was risinge of the sonne,  
And suche a presse into the playne
- briskly  
pleasant company*
- Tomorrow morning*
- There may  
are capable*
- in my position of power*
- obedient*
- virelays and lays*
- sphere; run*
- crowd*

*The Isle of Ladies*

	Assemble con, that withe great paine One might for other go ne stande, Ne none take other by the hand Witheouten they distorbed were, So huge and great the presse was ther.	<i>because of others nearby</i>
985		
	And after that, within two oweres, This mightye lord, all in flowers Of diverse coloures many a payer, In his estate up in the eyer, Well to fadome as his hight, <sup>1</sup>	<i>hours</i>
990	He sett him ther in all ther syght; And for the quene, and for the knyght, And for my ladye, and every wyght	<i>pair</i>
995	In hast he sende, so that never one Was ther absent, but come echeon. And when thay thus assembled were, As ye have hard me saye you here, Witheout more tarringe, on hight,	<i>sent</i>
1000	Ther to be sene of everye wyght, Up stood, amonge the presse above, A counseler, servaunt of Love, Wiche semed well of great estate;	<i>heard</i>
1005	And shewed ther how no debate Ofte ne goodlye might be used In gentullnes and be excussed. Wherefore he sayd his lordes will	<i>argument [against God of Love]</i>
	Was, every wyght there shuld be still And in peace and one accorde,	<i>Ought nor properly might</i>
1010	And thus comaunded at a word. And cane his tonge to suche laungauge	<i>courtesy</i>
	Turne, that yet in all his age Hard I never so coninglye	<i>instantly</i>
	Man speke, ne halfe so faythefullie;	<i>in all of his age</i>
1015	For every thinge he sayd there Semed as it insealed were	<i>Heard</i>
		<i>had the seal of authority</i>

<sup>1</sup> *Easily two fathoms (twelve feet) high*

*The Isle of Ladies*

	Or appreve for very trew. Shuche was his conninge langauge new, And well accordinge to his chere, That, where I be, me thinke I here Him yet alwaye, when I my one In any place may be allone. First con he of the lustye Ile All the astate in little while Reherse, and hollye every thinge That caused ther his lordes cominge; And everye wele, and every wo, And for what cause eche thinge was so, Well shewed he there, in easye speche;	<i>confirmed; absolute truth</i> <i>Such</i>
1020	First con he of the lustye Ile All the astate in little while Reherse, and hollye every thinge That caused ther his lordes cominge; And everye wele, and every wo, And for what cause eche thinge was so, Well shewed he there, in easye speche;	<i>hear</i> <i>on my own</i>
1025	And how the syke had nede of leche, And who that whole was and in grace, He told playnelye how eche thinge was. And, at the last, he con conclude, Voydinge every language rude, And sayd that prince, that mightye lord,	<i>condition</i>
1030	Or his deportinge wold accorde All the parties ther presente, And was the fyne of his entente: 'Witnesse his presence in your syght Whiche syttes amonge you in his might.'	<i>unhurried</i> <i>sick; physician</i>
1035	And kneled downe, witheowten more, And no o word spoke he more.	<i>Avoiding</i>
1040	Tho can this mightye lord him dresse, Withe chere avised to do largesse, <sup>1</sup> And sayd unto this knyght and me: 'Ye shall to joye restored be. And for ye have bene trewe, ye twayne, I graunte you here for every payne	<i>Before his departure</i>
1045	A thousand joyes everye weckee, And look ye be no lenger syke;	<i>prepared to rise</i>
1050	And bothe your ladyes — lo them here! —	<i>week</i> <i>no longer sick</i>

<sup>1</sup> *By his manner resolved to be generous*

*The Isle of Ladies*

- Take eche his owne. Beth of good chere!  
 Your happye daye is now begonne  
 Sythe yt was rissinge of the sunne.
- 1055 And to all other in this place,  
 I graunt hollye to staund in grace  
 That servethe trewelye witheout slowthe  
 And to avanced be, by trothe.'
- 1060 Tho can this knyght and I downe knele,  
 Weninge to do wonder well,  
 Sayinge, 'O Lord, your great mercye  
 Us hathe enriched so openly,
- 1065 That we deserve may nevermore  
 The least parte, but evermore  
 Withe sowle and bodye trulye serve  
 You and yours till we sterve.'
- 1070 And to oure ladyes, ther they stood,  
 This knyght that cothe so mikle good  
 Whent in hast, and I allso —  
 Joyeux and glad were we tho,
- 1075 And as riche in everye thowght  
 As he that all hathe and owe nowght —  
 And them besoute, in humble wise,  
 Us t'accepte to ther service
- 1080 And shewe us of ther frendlye cheres,  
 Wiche in ther treasure many yeres  
 They kepte had, us to great paine;  
 And told that servauntes twayne
- 1085 Were, and wolde be, and so had ever,  
 And for the deathe chaunge wold we never,  
 Ne do offence, ne thinge leke yll,  
 But full ther ordinaunce and will;
- And made oure othes freshe new,  
 Oure olde servaunce to renewe,  
 And hollye thers for evermore  
 We ther become, what might we more,
- 1085 And well awaytinge that in slowghth
- Thinking*
- die*  
*where*  
*much*
- owes*  
*besought*
- to our great distress*
- had [been]*  
*even in the face of death*  
*nor anything like an injury*  
*fulfill*
- service*
- whatever*  
*watching out; sloth*

*The Isle of Ladies*

	We made no faute, ne in no trothe, <sup>1</sup> Ne thowght not do, I you ensure, 1090      Withe oure will while we may duer.	<i>Nor thought not to do [any]</i>
1095	This season past, againse an eve This lord of the quene toke leve, And sayd he wold hastelye retorne And at good leisure there sojorne, Bothe for his honor and her ease, Comaunding fast the knyght to please. And gave his statutes in papers, And ordayned diverse officers, And forthe to shipe the same nyght	<i>time; towards one evening</i>
1100	He wente, and sone was owt of syght. And on the morrow, when the ayere Attempered was and wether fayer, Erlye at rysinge of the sonne, After the nyght awaye was ronne,	<i>Commanding [her] earnestly</i>
1105	Playinge us on the rivage, My lady spake of her viage, And sayd she made smale journeys And held her in straunge conteryes; And forthewithe to the quene went,	<i>More temperate</i>
1110	And shewed her holly her entent, And toke her leve withe chere wepinge, That petye it was to se that partinge. For to the quene it was a paine As to a martyre new slayne;	<i>Chatting playfully; shore journey was accustomed to make</i>
1115	That for her woo, and she so tender, Yet wepe I ofte, when I remembre. She offered ther to resyne	<i>in a tearful manner</i>
	To my ladye, eyght tymes or nyne, Th'astate, the Ile, shortlye to tell,	<i>resign</i>
1120	If it might please her ther to dwell; And sayd forever her linage Shuld to my lady do omage	<i>kin</i>

<sup>1</sup> *We committed no fault, nor erred with regard to truth*

*The Isle of Ladies*

- And herrs be holl, witheowten more,  
They and all thers for evermore.  
1125 'Naye, God forbyd,' my ladye ofte  
Withe many connynge wordes and softe  
Sayd, 'that ever suche thinge shuld bene  
That I consent shulde that a quene  
Of youre estate, and so well named,  
1130 In any wise shuld be entamed!  
But wold be fayne withe all my hart,  
What so befell or how me smarte,  
To do thinge that you might please  
In any wise, or be your ease.'
- 1135 And kysed ther, and bad goodnyght.  
For wiche leve wepte many a wyght.  
Ther might men here my ladye preyed,  
And suche a name of her arrayssed —  
What of connynge and fryndlyenes,  
1140 What of beautye withe jentulnes,  
What of glad and frendlye cheres  
That she used in all her yeres —  
That wonder was here every wight  
To saye well how they did ther might.  
1145 And withe a prese, upon the morrowe  
To shipe her browght; and with a sorrowe  
They made when she shuld under sayle,  
That, and ye wyst, ye wold mervayle!
- Forthe goethe the shipe; owt goethe the sonde;  
1150 And I, as wood man unbownde,  
For dowbte to be behinde there,  
Into the see, witheowten feare,  
Annone I ranne, till withe a wave  
All sodenly I was overthowghe;  
1155 And withe the water, to and fro,  
Bacwarde and forward, traveled so,  
That mynd and brethe nyghe was gone,  
That for good ne harme knew I none.  
Till, at the last, withe hockes twayne
- skillfully chosen*
- and of such a high reputation*
- harmed*
- or however I was hurt*
- leave-taking*
- exalted*
- to hear*
- To speak well [of her]*
- what*
- [begin to leave] under sail*
- if you knew*
- sounding-line*
- mad*
- so battered*
- I could not distinguish*
- hooks*

*The Isle of Ladies*

- 1160 Men of the shipe withe mickle paine  
To save my lyve dyd suche travell  
That, and ye wyst, ye wold mervell;  
And in the shipe me drew on highe,  
And sayden all that I wold dye,  
1165 And layd me longe downe by the maste,  
And of ther clothes upon me caste.  
And ther I made my testament,  
And wyst my selfe not what I mente;  
But when I sayd had what I wolde,  
1170 And to the mast my wo all toulde,  
And tane my leve at everye wight,  
And closyd myn eyne, and lost my syght,  
Avised to dye witheout more speche  
Or any remedye to seche,  
1175 Of grace newe, as was grete ned,  
My ladye of my paine toke hede,  
And her bethought how that for trothe  
To se me dye it were great routhe;  
And to me came in sobre wyse  
1180 And softelye sayd, 'I praye you, ryse.  
Come on withe me; let be this fare.  
All shall be well. Have ye no care.  
I woll obey, ye, and fulfull  
Holly in all that lordes will  
1185 That you and me, not longe ago,  
After his liste comaunded so,  
That ther agayne no resistaunce  
May be, witheout great offence.  
And therefore, here now what I saye.  
1190 I am, and wol be, frindlye aye.  
Ryse up! Beholde this avaantage  
I graunt you in erytage,  
Peaseble witheowt stryve  
Duringe the dayes of your lyfe.'
- 1195 And of her apples in my sleeve  
One she put, and toke her leve  
In wordes few, and sayd, 'Good hele,
- hard work*
- full length*
- taken*
- Resolved*  
*seek*
- thought to herself*
- behavior*
- yea*
- desire*
- great favor*  
*as a gift*  
*strife*
- health*

*The Isle of Ladies*

- He that all made you send, and wele!' *well-being*  
 Werewithe my paines, all at once,  
 1200 Toke suche leve, that all my bones  
 For the newe ourewe pleasaunce, *joyful*  
 So as they cothe, desyred to daunce.  
 And I, as hole as any wyght,  
 Up rose withe joyoux harte and light,  
 1205 Hole and unsyke, right well at ease,  
 And all forgett had my diseace;  
 And to my ladye, where she playd,  
 I went annone and to her sayd:  
 'He that all joyes, persones to plese,  
 1210 First ordayned withe perfyt ease,  
 And everye pleasure cane departe,  
 Send you, madame, as large parte;  
 And of his goodes suche plentye  
 As he has done you of bewtye,  
 1215 Withe hele and all that maye be thowght,  
 He send you all, as he all wrought.  
 Madame,' quod I, 'Your servaunte trewe  
 Have I byne longe, and yet woll new,  
 Witheowten chaunge or repentaunce *been; still will [be] anew*  
 1220 In any wise, or variaunce,  
 And so wool do, as thrive I ever;  
 For thinge is none that me is lever  
 Then you to please, however I fare,  
 Myn hartes ladye and my welfare,  
 1225 My lyfe, myn hele, my leche also  
 Of every thinge that doth me wo,  
 Myn helpe at ned, and my suertye  
 Of everye joye that longes to me,  
 My succors hole in all wyse *will  
dearer  
guarantee  
belongs  
My whole salvation*  
 1230 That may be thowght or man devise.  
 Your grace, madame, suche have I found  
 Now, in my nead, that I am bound  
 To you for ever, so Christ me save,  
 For hele and lyve of you I have; *life*  
 1235 Wherfore is reason I you serve

*The Isle of Ladies*

	Withe dew obeysaunce till I starve, And so wil do by my trothe,' Quod I, 'Madame, witheout slouthe, And dead and quicke be ever youres, 1240 Late, erlye, and at all owers.'	due obedience
	Tho can my ladye smyle a lyte, And in playne englyshe on consyte, <sup>1</sup> In wordes fewe, holl her entent She shewed me ther, and how she ment	hours
1245	To meward, in every wyse, Holly she can all ther devise Witheout prosses or longe travell, <sup>2</sup> Charginge me to kepe counsell	Towards me
	As I wold to her grace attayne; Of wiche comaundemente I was fayne. Wherefore I passe over at this tyme, For counsell cordes not well in ryme, <sup>3</sup>	the secret
1250	And eak the othe, that I have swore, To breke me were bet unbore; <sup>4</sup> Whi for untrewe for evermore I shuld be hold, that nevermore	also
1255	Of me in place shuld be reporte Thinge that avayle might or comfort To mewrdes in any wysse, And eche wyght wold me dispice	The reason being that
	In that they couthe, and me repreve, Whiche were a thinge sore for to greve; Wherefore, hereof more mencyon Make I not now, ne longe sermone,	reported
1260	But shortlye thus I me excuse: To ryme a counsell I refuse.	Towards me; way despise
1265	Saylinge thus, two dayes or thre,	Because of what they knew discourse

<sup>1</sup> *And in plain English, according with her view of the matter*

<sup>2</sup> *Without a lot of words or laborious business*

<sup>3</sup> *For a secret is not appropriate to rhyme*

<sup>4</sup> *It were better for me not to have been born than to break it*

*The Isle of Ladies*

- My ladye, towardes her cunteryne,  
 Over the waves highe and grene  
 1270 Wiche were large and depe betwene,  
 Upon a tyme me cauled, and sayd  
 That of my hele she was well paide;  
 And of the quene, and of the Ile,  
 She taled withe me longe while,  
 1275 And of all that she there had sene,  
 And of th'astate, and of the quene,  
 And of the ladyes, name by name,  
 Two owres or mo, this was her game.  
 Till at the last the wynde can ryse,  
 1280 And blew so fast, and in suche wyse,  
 The shipe, that every wyght con saye:  
 'Madame, or eve be of this daye,  
 And God tofore, ye shal be there  
 As ye wold faynest that ye were;  
 1285 And doubte not that withein six owres  
 Ye shal be ther as all is youres.'  
 At welche wordes she cane to smyle,  
 And sayd that was no longe while  
 That they hur sett, and up she rosse,  
 1290 And all abowt the shipe she goes,  
 And mad good chere to everye wyght,  
 Till of the londe she had syght;  
 Of wiche syght glad, God yt wote,  
 She was, and abasshed annon a boote  
 1295 And forthe goethe, shortlye you to tell,  
 Where she accostomed was to dwell,  
 And recyved was, as good right,  
 Withe joyeux chere and hartes light,  
 And as a glad newe aventure,  
 1300 Pleasaunte to every creature.
- Withe welche landinge tho I woke,  
 And found my chaumbre full of smoke,  
 My chekes eke, unto the eares,  
 And all my body weate of teares;  
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*The Isle of Ladies*

- 1305 And all so feble and in suche wise  
 I was, that unethe might I rise,  
 So fare traveled and so feynte,  
 That neither knew I kyrk ne saynt,  
 Ne what was what, ne who was who,  
 1310 N'avysed what wey I wolde goo.  
 But, by aventures grace,  
 I ryse and welke sawght paace and pace,  
 Till I a windinge stayer founde,  
 And held the vice ay in my hand,  
 1315 And upwardes sauftelye so can crepe  
 Till I cam where I thowght to slepe  
 More at myn ease and owt of presse,  
 At my good leysure and in peace,  
 Till somewhat I recoumfort were  
 1320 Of the travell and great feare  
 That I indured had before:  
 This was my thought, witheowt more.  
 And as a wyght wittles and faynte,  
 Witheout more, in a chaumbre painte  
 1325 Full of storyes old and diverse —  
 More then I cane now reherse —  
 Unto a bed full soberlye,  
 So as I might full sauftelye,  
 Pace after other, and nothinge sayd.  
 1330 Till, at the last, downe I me layde;  
 And, as my mynd wolde geve me leve,  
 All that I dremed had that eve  
 Before, all I con reherse,  
 Right as a childe at skole his vearse  
 1335 Dothe, after that he thinkethe to thrive,  
 Right so did I; for all my lyve  
 I thawght to have in remembraunce —  
 Bothe the paine and the pleasaunce —  
 The dreame, hole as yt me befell,  
 1340 Wiche was as ye here me tell.

Thus in my thowghtes as I laye,

*hardly  
 So greatly over-exerted  
 church*

*Nor knew  
 fortune's grace  
 walked soft step by step  
 stair  
 central newel-shaft  
 softly*

*out of danger*

*[I approached] a bed  
 softly  
 Step by step*

*in so far as he*

*The Isle of Ladies*

- That happy or unhappy daye —  
Woote I not, so have I blame,  
Of the two wiche is the name —  
Befell me so that ther a thought  
By processe new on slepe me browght,  
And me governed so, in a while,  
That agayne withein the Ile  
Me thawght I was; where of the knyght,  
1345 And of the ladyes I had a syght,  
And were assembled on a grene,  
Knyght and lady withe the quene;  
At wiche assemble ther was sayd  
How they all content and payd  
1350  
1355 Were holly, as in that o thinge,  
That the knyght ther shuld be kynge,  
And thay wold all for suer wytnes  
Wedded be, bothe more and lesse,<sup>1</sup>  
In remembraunce, witheout more;  
1360 Thus they concente for evermore.  
And was concluded that the knyght  
Depart shulde the same nyght,  
And forthewithe ther take his viage,  
To jorneye for his mariage  
1365 And retorne withe suche an ooste  
That weddid might be lest and most;  
This was concluded, writton, and sealed,  
That yt might not be repeled  
In no wyse, but aye be fyrme,  
1370 And all shuld be withein a terme  
Witheouwt more excusacyon,  
Bothe feast and coronacyon.
- This knyght, wiche had thereof the charge,  
Annone into a littull barge  
1375 Browght was, late ageynst an eve,  
Where of all he toke his leave;

*even though I am to be blamed*

*In due course again*

*pleased*

*a host  
the least and the greatest*

*a set time*

*late towards one evening*

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<sup>1</sup> *Wedded be, both those of higher and those of lower rank*

## *The Isle of Ladies*

1380	Wiche barge was a manes thowght, After his pleasure it him browght; The quene herselfe accostomed aye In the same barge to pleye.	
	Yt nedethe nether mast ne rother — I have not hard of suche another — Ne master for the governaunce; Hit sayled by thowght and by pleasaunce,	<i>rudder</i> <i>heard</i>
1385	Witheowt labor, est or west All was one, calme and tempest. And I wente withe, at his requeste, And was the first prayed to the fest.	<i>with [him]</i> <i>invited</i>
1390	When he come in his cuntrye, And passed had the wavy sea, In an haven, depe and large, He left his riche and noble barge,	
	And to the court, shortlye to tell, He wente, where he was wont to dwell;	
1395	And was receyved as good right As heyre and for a worthi knyght, Withe all the stattes of the lande Wiche come annon at his first sende,	<i>as was proper</i> <i>persons of rank</i>
	Withe glad spirites, full of trothe, Lothe to do faute, or withe a slouthe Attaynte be in any wyse —	<i>summons</i>
1400	Ther riches was ther olde service, Wiche ever trew had be founde Sythe first inhabyte was the lond.	<i>Be found guilty</i>
1405	And so receyved ther there kynge, That forgotten was nothinge That owe to be done, ne might please,	
	Ne ther soverayne lord do ease, And withe them so, shortlye to saye,	<i>ought</i>
1410	As they of custome had done aye. For seven yere past was, and more, The father, the olde, wyse and hoore Kinge of the lande, toke his leve	<i>And [done] by them thus</i> <i>For it was seven years ago</i> <i>[Since] the father; grey-haired</i>
	Of all his barones one an eve,	

*The Isle of Ladies*

- 1415 And tolde them how his dayes past  
Were all, and comen was the laste;  
And hartelye prayd hem to remembre,  
His sonne, wiche yonge was and tender,  
That borne was ther prince to be,
- 1420 Yf he retorne to that cuntrye  
Might, be aventure or grace,  
Withein any tyme or space;  
And to be trewe and frindlye aye,  
As they to him had bene allweye,
- 1425 Thus he them prayd, witheowt more,  
And toke his leve for evermore.  
Knowne was how, in tender age  
This younge prince a great viage,  
Oncouthe and straunge, onors to sekche,
- 1430 Toke on hand, withe littull speche;  
Wiche was to seke a princes  
That he desyred more then riches  
For her great name that flowred so,  
That in that tyme ther was no moo
- 1435 Of her estate, ne so well named,  
For borne was none that ever hir blamed;  
Of wiche princes, sumewhate before  
Here have I spoke, and sonne will more.
- So thus befell as ye shall here.  
1440 Unto the lord they made suche chere,  
That joye was, there to be presente  
To se ther trothe and how they ment;  
So very glade they were echeone,  
That them amonge ther was not one
- 1445 That desyred more riches  
Than for ther lord suche a princes,  
That they might please and that were fayer;  
For faste desyred they an heyer,  
And sayd great suertye were, iwis.<sup>1</sup>
- by good fortune*  
*Marvellous; honors; seek*  
*princess*  
*rank; spoken of*  
*soon*  
*heir*

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<sup>1</sup> *And said it would be a source of great security, truly*

*The Isle of Ladies*

- 1450 And as they were speakinge of this,  
 The prince himeselfe him avised,  
 And in playne englyshe undisgised  
 Them shewed hole his jorneye,  
 And of ther counsell can them praye;  
 And tolde how he ensured was,  
 And how his daye he might not passe  
 Witheouwt dishonor and great blame  
 And to him forever a shame;  
 And of ther counsell and avise  
 There he prayed them, once or twyse,  
 And that they wolde withein ten dayes  
 Avise and ordayne him suche wayes  
 So that it were no displeasance,  
 Ne to this reme over great grevaunce,  
 1460 And that he have might to his feaste  
 Sixti thousannd at the leaste;  
 For his intente withein short while  
 Was to retorne unto this Ile  
 That he came fro, and kepe his daye:  
 1470 For nothinge wolde he be awaye.  
 To counsell tho the lordes annone  
 Into a chaumbre everychon  
 Together went, them to devyse  
 How they might best, and in what wise,  
 1475 Purveye for ther lordes pleasaunce  
 And the realmes contynuaunce  
 Of honor, whiche in it before  
 Had contynewed evermore.  
 So, at the last, they founde the weys  
 1480 How withein the next fyftene dayes  
 All myght withe paine and diligence  
 Be done, and cast what the dispence  
 Might draw and, in conclusyon,  
 Made for eache thinge provisyon.
- 1485 When this was done hollye, tofore  
 The prince, the lordes all before
- made up his mind*  
*committed*  
*due date*  
*Advise*  
*realm; excessive*  
*Not for anything*  
*estimated; expense*  
*amount to*

*The Isle of Ladies*

- Come and shewed what they had done,  
And how they couthe by no reason  
Fynde that within the ten dayes  
1490 He myght departe, by no wayes,  
But wolde be fistene at least  
Or he retorne might to his feaste;  
And shewed him every reason whi  
Yt myght not be so hastelye  
1495 As he desyred, ne his daye  
He might not kepe by no waye,  
For diverse causes wonder greate.  
Wiche when he hard, in suche a heate  
He fell for sorrowe, and was syke  
1500 Stil in his bed hole that weake  
And nyghe the tother, for the shame,  
And for the dowbte, and for the blame  
That might on him be arette.  
And oft uppon his brest he bette,  
1505 And sayd: 'Allas! Myn honor for aye  
Have I here lost clene this daye.  
Ded wold I be! Allas, my name  
Shall aye be more hensemforthe in shame,  
And I disonered and repreved  
1510 And never more shal be beleved!'  
And made suche sorowe that, in trothe,  
Him to behold it was great rothe.
- And so endured the dayes fyftene  
Till that the lordes, of an even,  
1515 Him come and toulde they reydye wayre,  
And shewed, in fewe wordes there,  
How and what wysse they had purveyd  
For his estate; unto him sayde  
That twentye thousannd knyghtes of name  
1520 And fortye thousande witheowt blame,  
All come of noble lyne,  
Togather in a compayne  
Were lodged on a ryvers syde,
- all that week*  
*And most of the next*
- attributed*
- I wish I were dead*  
*Shall be for evermore*  
*reproved*
- one evening*  
*were ready*
- in what way*

*The Isle of Ladies*

	Him and his pleasures ther to abyde.	
1525	The prince, tho, for joye uprosse And, were they lodged were, he goes, Witheout more, the same nyght, And ther his supper made to dytte, And withe them boode till it was daye, And forthewithe so toke his journeye, Levinge the streyght, holdinge the large, <sup>1</sup> Till he come till his noble barge.	<i>And, where caused to be prepared remained to</i>
1530	And when this prince, this lusty knyght, Withe his pepull in armes bright Was comen where he thowght to passe, And knewe well none abyden was Behind, but all were there present, Forthewithe annone all his entent He told them ther, and made his cryes	<i>embark proclamations</i>
1535	Throwghe his host that daye twyse, Comandinge every lyves wight, Ther beinge present in his syght, To be the morrowe on the rivage Where he begine wold his vioage.	<i>living creature shore</i>
1540	The morrow come; the crye was kept; Fewe was ther that night that slepte, But trussed and purveyed for the morowe. Faute of shippes was all ther sorrowe; For save the barge and other two,	<i>the proclamation was kept packed and provided Lack</i>
1545	Of shippes ther sawe I no moe. Thus in ther dowbtes as they stode, Waxinge the see, cominge the flode, Was cryed: 'To shipe go, everye wight!'	<i>The sea rising, the tide coming in</i>
1550	Then was but hye that hye myght. Unto the barge, me thowght, echeon They wente; witheout was lefte not one — Horse, male, trusse, ne baggage, Sallett, spere, gardbrace, ne page —	<i>everyone hurrying that could outside bag, package Helmet; arm-guard</i>
1555	But was louged and rome inowghe.	

<sup>1</sup> *Leaving the narrow [path], keeping to the broad [highway]*

*The Isle of Ladies*

- 1560 At wiche shippinge me thought I lowghe,  
And cane to marvell in my thought  
How ever suche a shipe was wrought;  
For what people that cane increasse  
Ne never so thicke might be the presse,  
1565 But all had rome at ther will.  
Ther was not one that was lodged yll;  
For, as I trow, my selfe the laste  
Was one that lodged by the mast,  
And where I loked I sawe suche rome  
1570 As all were lodged in a towne.
- Forthe goethe the shipe; sayd was the crede;  
And on ther knees, for ther good spedde,  
Downe kneled every wight a while  
And prayed fast unto the Ile  
1575 They might come in savetye,  
The prince and all the companye,  
Withe worshipe and witheout blame  
Or disslander of his name  
Of the promese he shuld retorne  
1580 Withein the tyme he did sojorne  
In his land, bidding his hoost —  
This was ther prayer, lest and most.  
To kepe the daye duye, it might not bene,  
That he appoyn had withe the quene,  
1585 To retorne witheowt slouthe,  
And so assured had his trothe.  
For wiche faute, this prince, this knyghte,  
Durynge the tyme slepte not a night;  
Suche was his woo and his disease,  
1590 For dowbt he shuld the quene displeace.
- Forthe goethe the shipe withe suche spede,  
Right as the prince for his great neade  
Desyer wolde after his thawghte,  
Till it unto the Ile him browght;  
Were in hast, upon the sannde,
- feat of ship-loading; laughed*  
*whatever the number of people*  
*And however thick*  
*room*
- good success*  
*prayed [that]*  
*safety*
- Concerning the promise*  
*summoning his retinue*  
*due*
- Where; beach*

*The Isle of Ladies*

	He and his people toke the land Withe hartes glade and chere light, Weninge to be in heven that night. But or they passed had a myle, Enteringe in toward that Ile, All cladd in blacke withe chere peteus A lady, wiche never dispeteouse Had be in all her lyfe tofore, Withe sorye chere and harte to-tore, Unto this prince, where he cane ryde, Come and sayde: 'Abyde! Abyde! And have no hast, but fast retorne. No reason is ye here sojorne, For your untrothe hathe us distroyed;	<i>disembarked</i>
1600	Wiche is the cause of all oure peine.' 'Allas, madame!' quod tho this knight; And withe that from his horse he light Withe color pale and chekes lene. 'Allas, what is this for to mene? What have ye sayde? Whi be you wrothe? You to displease I wold be lothe.	<i>Thinking</i>
1605	Accursed be he you hether browght, For all oure joye is turned to nowght. Youre accquayntaunce we may complayne, Wiche is the cause of all oure peine.'	<i>cruel</i>
1610	'Allas, madame!' quod tho this knight; And withe that from his horse he light Withe color pale and chekes lene. 'Allas, what is this for to mene? What have ye sayde? Whi be you wrothe? You to displease I wold be lothe.	<i>torn to pieces</i>
1615	Knowe ye not well the promese I made have to youre princes, Wiche to performe is myne entent, So mote I sped, as I have mente, And as I am her verye trewe, Witheowte chaunge or thowght new,	<i>instantly</i>
1620	And also solelye her seruaunte As creature or man lyvenante May be to ladye or princes;	<i>Woe be to</i>
1625	So mote I sped, as I have mente, And as I am her verye trewe, Witheowte chaunge or thowght new,	<i>born</i>
1630	As creature or man lyvenante May be to ladye or princes;	<i>lost</i>
		<i>So may I prosper very true [servant]</i>
		<i>solely living</i>

## *The Isle of Ladies*

- |      |  |   |
|------|--|---|
| 1635 | For she myn heven and hole riches<br>Is, and the ladye of myn hele,<br>My wordes joye and all my wele.<br>What maye this be? Wense comes this speche?<br>Tell me, madame, I you beseche;<br>For sythe the first of my lyvinge<br>Was I so fearfull of nothinge<br>As I am now to here you speke.<br>For dowbte I feale my harte brecke.<br>Say on, madame! Tell me your will.<br>The remenaunt is it good or ill?’ | <i>world's<br/>Whence</i><br><i>the first day of my life</i>  |
| 1640 |  |   |
| 1645 | ‘Allas,’ quod she, ‘that you ware bore!<br>For, for your love, this land is lore;<br>The quene is ded, and that is rothe,<br>For sorrow of your great untrothe.  | <i>pity</i>   |
| 1650 | Of two partes of the lusty rowte<br>Of ladyes that were here abowte,<br>That wonte were to tale and pleye,<br>Nowe ar ded and clene awaye,<br>And under earthe tane lodginge newe.<br>Alas, that ever ye were untrewe!   | <i>Some two thirds<br/>chat<br/>taken</i>   |
| 1655 | For when the tyme ye sett was paste,<br>The quene to counsell sone in hast —<br>What was to do? — and sayd great blame<br>Your accquayntaunce cause wold and shame,<br>And the ladyes of ther avise  | <i>soon [went]</i>  |
| 1660 | Prayed, for nead was to be wisse<br>In eschewinge tales and songes,<br>That by them make culd evell tunges,<br>And say they were lyghtlye conquest<br>And prayed to a poore feast  | <i>for their advice<br/>need; wise</i>  |
| 1665 | And fowle had ther worshipe wayved,<br>When so onwyseleye they conceyved<br>Ther riche treasure and ther hele,<br>Ther famous name and ther wele,<br>To put in suche an aventure;  | <i>concerning them; could<br/>easily conquered<br/>invited<br/>honor given up<br/>unwisely; thought<br/>happiness</i> |
| 1670 | Of wiche the slander ever duer   | <i>to such hazard<br/>ever to last</i>  |

*The Isle of Ladies*

- Was lyke, witheowt helpe of apele; *appeal*  
 Wherefore they nedē had of counscell,  
 For everye wight of them wold saye  
 Ther closed Ile an open weye
- 1675 Was become to every wight,  
 And well approved by a knyght, *confirmed*  
 Wiche he holles, witheowt pesaunce,  
 Had sone atcheved th'obeysaunce. *entirely; trouble*
- 1680 All this was meved at counsell thrise, *put forward for discussion*  
 And concludedd daylye twise,  
 That bet was dye witheowt blame  
 Then losse the riches of her name.
- 1685 Wherefor, the deathes acquantaunce  
 They chese, and leste have ther pleasaunce,  
 For dowbte to lyve as repreved *chose; lost*  
 In that they you so sone beleved; *under reproof*  
 And made ther othes withe one accord,  
 That eate, ne drinke, ne speke a worde
- 1690 They shuld never, but ever wepinge  
 Byde in oo place witheout partinge,  
 And use ther dayes in penaunce,  
 Witheowt desyer of allegiaunce. *alleviation*
- 1695 Of wiche the trothe annone con preve;  
 For whi the quene, forthewithe, her leve  
 Tooke at them all that were present,  
 Of her defautes fullye repente, *was demonstrated*  
 And dyed there witheowten more. *Because*
- 1700 Thus ar we lost for evermore.  
 What shuld I more hereof reherse?  
 Come on withe me. Come se the herse, *repentant*  
 Where ye shall se the petiust syght  
 That ever yet was shewed to knyght;
- 1705 For ye shal se ladyes stand,  
 Eche withe a great rood in hand, *rod*  
 Clade in blacke, withe visage whight, *white*  
 Be rydye eche other for to smyte; *ready*  
 Yf any be that will not wepe,  
 Or who that makes countenaunce to slepe,

*The Isle of Ladies*

- 1710 They be so bet, that also blewe  
 They be, as clothe that dyed is newe.  
 Suche is ther perfyte repentaunce.  
 And thus they kepe ther ordinaunce,  
 And woll do ever to the deathe,  
 While them induers any brethe.'
- 1715 This knyght, tho, in armes twayne  
 This ladye toke, and cone her saynne:  
 'Allas my birthe! Wo worthe my lyfe!'  
 And even withe that he drewe a knyfe  
 And thorowghe gowne, dublet, and shirte,  
 1720 He made the blode cume from his hart;  
 And sett him downe uppon the grene,  
 And full repent, and closeyd his eyne,  
 And, save that once he drew his brethe,  
 Witheowt more thus he tooke his deathe.
- 1725 For wiche cause, the lustye hoost  
 Whiche, in a battayle on the coste,<sup>1</sup>  
 At once, for sorrowe, suche a crye  
 Con reare thorowe the companye,  
 That to the heven hard was the sowne  
 1730 And under th' earthe as far downe,  
 That wild beastes for feare  
 So sodanlye aferde awere,  
 That for the doubt, while they might duer,  
 They ranne as of ther lyves unsuer  
 1735 From the woddes unto the plaine,  
 And from the valles the highe mountayne  
 They sowght, and rane as bestes blind  
 That clene forgotten had ther kynd.
- This wo not ceassed, to counsell went  
 This lordes, and for that ladye sente,  
 And of avise what was to done  
 They her besowght she saye wold sone.
- beaten*
- Woe is*
- fully repented*
- Was raised  
heard; noise*
- nature*
- advice; to be done*

---

<sup>1</sup> Which [was still] in battle-formation on the coast

*The Isle of Ladies*

- Wepinge full sore, all clad in blacke,  
 This ladye saftelye to them spake,  
 And sayd: 'My lordes, by my trothe,  
 This mischeve holl is of your slouthe.  
 And yf ye had, that judge wold right,  
 A prince that were a very knyght,  
 Ye that bene of estate, eche one  
 Dye for his faute shulde, one and one;  
 For ye hold had the promesse,  
 And done that longes to jentulnes,  
 And fulfilled the prince behest,  
 This hastye harme had bene a feast,  
 And now is unrecoverable,  
 And us a slander aye durable.  
 Wherefore I saye, as of counsell,  
 In me is none that may avayle;  
 But, yf you list, for remembraunce,  
 Purveye and make such ordinaunce  
 That the quene, that was so meke,  
 Withe all her wemen, ded or syke,  
 Might in your land a chapell have,  
 Withe some remembraunce on her grave  
 Shewinge her end withe the petye,  
 In somme notable olde cetye,  
 Nighe unto an highe-waye  
 Where everye wight might for her praye,  
 And for all heres that have bene trewe.'  
 And even withe that she chaunged hewe,  
 And twise wished after the deathe,  
 And syght, and thus passed her brethe.  
 Then sayd the lordes of the ooste,  
 And so concluded lest and most,  
 That they wold ever in houses of thacke  
 Ther lyves use, and were but blacke,  
 And forsake all ther pleasaunces,  
 And turne all joye to penaunces,  
 And bare the ded prince to the barge,  
*softly*  
*whole; due to your  
[you] that would judge rightly  
a true*  
*one by one  
if you had kept  
belongs*  
*sudden; celebration*  
*to us; lasting forever*  
*if it pleases you*  
*all piteous circumstances  
city*  
*hers (i.e., women)*  
*sighed*  
*thatch*  
*spend; wear*  
*And they bore*

*The Isle of Ladies*

- 1780 And named them shuld have the charge.  
And to the hearse where laye the quene  
The remenante went, and downe on knene,  
Holdinge ther handes on hight, con crye,  
'Mercy! Mercy!' everiche thrye; *appointed those who  
each one thrice*
- 1785 And cursed the tyme that ever slouth  
Shuld have suche masterdome of trothe.  
And to the barge, a long mile,  
They bere her forthe, and in a while  
All the ladyes, one and one, *crossed over; landed  
hearses; beach*
- 1790 By companies were browght echeon;  
And past the see, and toke the lande,  
And in newe hersses on a sannde  
Put, and browght were all annone  
Unto a cety clossen with the stone, *been ever the custom*
- 1795 Where it had bene used aye  
The kynges of the lannd to leye  
After they reyned in honors,  
And wright was wiche were conquerers,  
In an abbye of nonnes wiche were blacke, *And it was written*
- 1800 Wiche accostomed were to wacke,  
And of ussage rysse eche a night  
To pray for everye lyves wight.  
And as befell, as is the gyse,  
Ordayned and sayd was the service *keep vigil*
- 1805 Of the prince and of the quene  
As devoutlye as might bene;  
And after that, abowght the hercesse,  
Many orrysonnes and veurses,  
Witheowt note, full softelye *living creature*
- 1810 Sayd were and full hartelye,  
That all the night, till it was daye,  
The peple in the churche cone preye  
Unto the Hollye Trynite  
Of those sowles to have petye. *And so it befell; custom  
about; hearses  
prayers; verses  
music  
devoutly*
- 1815 And when the night past and ronne  
Was, and the newe daye begonne, *Holy*

*The Isle of Ladies*

	The yonge morrowe withe rayes redd, Wiche from the sonne over all con spredd, Attempered cleare was and fayer, And made a tyme of holsome ayer, Befell a wonder case and straunge Amonge the people, and con chaunge Sone the worde and everye woo Unto a joye, and some to two.	<i>Was made mild and clear air an astonishing happening</i>
1820	A byrde all fethered blewe and grene, Withe bright arrayes, lyke gold, betwene, As smale thredes over every joynte, All full of collors straunge and cointe, Uncothe and wonderfull to syghte, Upon the quenes herse cone lyghte, And songe full lowe and softelye Thre songes in his armoneye, Unletted of every wight; Till, at the last, an aged knyght,	<i>streaks</i>
1825	Whiche seemed a man in great thought Lyke as he sett all thinge at nawght, Withe visage and eyne over-wepte, And pale as mane longe unslepte, By the hersses as he stoode,	<i>exotically beautiful Unfamiliar alighted</i>
1830	Withe hasty handelinge of his hood Unto a prince that by him past, Made the birde somewhat agast; Wherefore he rose, and lefte his songe, And departe from us amonge,	<i>Unhindered</i>
1835	And spred his winges for to passe By the place he entered was; And in his hast, shortlye to tell, He him hurte, that bacwarde downe he fell From a windowe, richelye painte	<i>exhausted with weeping</i>
1840	Withe lyves of many a dyverse saynte, And beate his winges, and bled faste, And of the hurte thus dyed and paste, And ley ther well an hower or more, Till, at the last, of birdes a skore	<i>touching [or doffing]</i>
1845		<i>frightened</i>
1850		<i>passed away</i>

*The Isle of Ladies*

1855	Come, and sembled at the place Where the windowe broken was, And made suche weymentacyon, That petye was to here the son And the werbelinge of ther throtes	<i>gathered</i>
1860	And the complainte in ther nottes, Wiche from joye clene was reversed. And of them on the glasse sone percsyd, And in his beke, of colours nyne, An erb he browght, flowerles, all grene,	<i>lamentation</i> <i>sound</i>
1865	Full of smale leves and plaine, Swerte, and longe, withe many a vayne; And where his fellowe laye thus ded, This erbe downe layd by his hede, And dressed hit full softelye,	<i>one of them; pierced</i>
1870	And hange his hede, and stode therbye. Whiche erbe, in lesse then halfe an owere, Cone over all knote, and after flower Full owt, and rype the seade;	<i>Dark</i>
1875	And right this one another feede Wold, in his beake, he toke a grayne And in his fellowes beke, certayne, Yt put; and thus withein the thirde, Up stode and pruned him the birde	<i>arranged</i>
1880	Wiche dede had be in all oure syght, And bothe together forthe ther flyght Toke, singinge, from us, and ther leve; Was none disturbe them wold, ne greve.	<i>hour</i> <i>Burst into bud all over</i>
1885	And when they perted were and gone, Th' abbas the seades sone echeon Gathered had, and in her hande Th' erbe she helde, well avisante	<i>And just as one [bird]</i>
1890	The lefe, the sede, the stalke, the flower, And sayd it had a good savor And was no comone herbe to fynde And well approved of uncothe kynde, And then other more vertuous;	<i>in a trice</i> <i>preened</i> <i>dead</i>
		<i>departed</i>
		<i>abbess</i>
		<i>closely inspecting</i>
		<i>confirmed; unfamiliar</i>

## *The Isle of Ladies*

- |      |   |   |
|------|---|---|
|      | Who so yt have myght, for to use<br>In his neade — flower, lefe, or graine —<br>Of ther hele myght be certainge;  |   |
| 1895 | And layd it downe uppon the hersse<br>Where lay the quene, and con rehersse<br>Eche one to other that they had sene.<br>And talinge this, the seade wox grene,<br>And on the drye herse con springe,<br>Wiche me thought a wonder thinge,<br>And after that, flower an new seade,<br>Of wiche the pepull all toke hede<br>And sayd yt was some great miracle<br>Or medycyne more fyne then treacle, <sup>1</sup><br>And were well done ther to assaye<br>Yf yt might ease in any waye<br>The corsses wiche withe torche-lyght<br>Thay waked had ther, all that night. | <i>what<br/>And as they talked thus<br/>[came] flower and<br/>And it would do well<br/>corpses<br/>had kept vigil over<br/>consented<br/>little fuss<br/>swoon; all the company<br/>for a long time<br/>they called living a pain<br/>faithful and honest<br/>choose and prepare<br/>mouth, consecutively</i> |
| 1900 |   |   |
| 1905 |   |   |
| 1910 | Sone were the lordes there concent,<br>And all the pepull therto content,<br>Withe easye wordes and lyttull fare,<br>And made the quenes visage bare,<br>Wiche shewed was to all abowte;<br>Wherfore in sowne fell hole the rowte,<br>And were so sorye, most and leste,<br>That longe of wepinge they not ceased;<br>For, of ther lord the remembraunce<br>Unto them was suche displeasance,<br>That for to lyve they cauled paine,<br>So were they verye trewe and playne.<br>And after this, the good abbas  |   |
| 1915 | Of the greynes con chesse and dresse<br>Thre, withe her fingers clene and smale;<br>And in the quenes mothe, be tall,<br>One after other full easelye<br>She put and full coninglye,  |   |
| 1920 |   |   |
| 1925 |   |   |

<sup>1</sup> *Or medicine more potent than any antidote [for poison]*

*The Isle of Ladies*

	Wiche sheewed sone suche vertu, That preved was the medicyne trewe; For withe a smylinge countenaunce	
1930	The quene uprose, and of usaunce, As she was wonte, to everye wight She made good chere; for wiche syght, The people knelynge on the stones Thowght they in heven were, sowle and bones.	<i>according to custom</i>
1935	Unto the prince where he laye They went, to make the same assaye. And when the quene it understode, And how the medicyne was good, She prayed she might have the greynes	<i>attempt</i>
1940	To releve him from the paines Whiche she and he had bothe endured; And to him wente, and so him ured, That withein a lyttull space Lustye and freshe one lyve he was,	<i>brought a happy destiny</i>
1945	And in good hele, and hole of speche, And lowghe, and sayd, 'Gramercy, leche.' For whiche the joye throwgheowt the towne So great was, that the belles sowne Affrayde the peopull a jorneye <sup>1</sup>	<i>alive perfectly able to speak laughed; Many thanks</i>
1950	Abowte the cetye everye waye And comen and asked cause and whi They rongen were so statteleye. And after that, the quene, th' abbas, Made dilligence, or theye wolde cease,	<i>grandly</i>
1955	Suche that of ladyes sonne a rowte Suinge the quene was all abowte; And cauled by name eche one and tolde, Was none forgotton, yonge ne olde. There mighte mene se joyes newe,	<i>Made every effort, before</i>
1960	When the medicyne, fyne and trewe, Thus restored had every wight, As well the ladyes as the knyght,	<i>Attending upon counted them off men</i>

<sup>1</sup> *Frightened people the distance of a day's journey away*

*The Isle of Ladies*

- Unto perfyte joye and hele,  
 That flyttinge they were in suche wele,  
 As folke that wolde in no wyse  
 Desyer more perfyte parradysse. *abounding*
- 1965
- And thus, when passed was the sorrowe,  
 Withe mickell joye, sone on the morrowe,  
 The kinge, the quene, and everye lord,  
 Withe all the ladyes, by one accorde  
 A generall assemble  
 Gert crye thorowghe the cunterye;  
 The whiche after, as ther intente,  
 Was turned to a parlament, *Caused to be proclaimed*
- 1970
- Where was ordayne and avised  
 Everye thinge and devised  
 That please might to most and lest.  
 And ther concluded was, the feast  
 Withein the Ile to be holde, *resolved*
- 1975
- Withe full concente of yonge and olde;  
 In the same wyse as before  
 All thinges shulde be, witheowten more;  
 And shipeden, and thether went. *worked out*
- 1980
- And into straunge remes sent  
 To kinges, quenes, and ducheses,  
 To diverse princes and princesses  
 Of ther linage, and cane praye,  
 Yf yt lyke them, at that daye *everyone, regardless of rank*
- 1985
- Of marriage, for ther sporte,  
 Come se the Ile and them disperte,  
 Where shulde be justes and turneyes,  
 And armes done in other wayes, *without more ado*
- 1990
- Signyfyinge over all the daye,  
 After Aprell withein Maye. *[they] took ship*
- 1995
- And was avised that ladyes twayne  
 Of good estate and wel besene,  
 Withe certayne knightes and squiers,  
 And of the quenes officers,  
 In maner of imbassad *far-off realms* *feats of arms*
- Announcing everywhere*
- [Which should be] after*
- [it] was resolved*
- well turned out*
- embassy*

*The Isle of Ladies*

2000	Withe certeyne leters, closed and made, Shuld take the barge, and departe, And seke my ladye evrye parte Till they her founde, for any thinge; Bothe charged thus, quene and kinge,	<i>sealed</i>
2005	And as ther ladye and misteris, For to besike, of jentulnes, At the daye ther for to bene. And ofte her recomaunde the quene, And prayed, for all loves, to hast;	<i>without fail</i>
2010	For but she come, all woll be wast, And the feast a busynes Witheout joye or lustynes; And toke them tokenes, and god spede <sup>1</sup> Prayed God send, after ther neade.	<i>as [she was]; mistress</i>
		<i>commended herself [to her]</i>
		<i>tedious chore</i>
2015	Forthe wente the ladyes and the knightes, And were owt fourteen dayes and nightes, And browght my ladye in ther barge, And had well sped, and done the charge. Whereof the quene so hartelye glad	<i>commission</i>
2020	Was, that in sothe shuche joyes she hadd When the shipe approched lannde, That she my ladye on the sannde Met, and in armes so constrainye, That wonder was beholde them twayne	<i>such</i>
2025	Whiche, to my dome, duringe twelve oures, Nether for heat ne watery showers Departed not; ne companye, Savinge themselfe, bode none them bye, But gave them leasure, at ther ease,	<i>embraced</i>
2030	To reherse joye and diseace, After the pleasure and corrages Of ther yonge and tender ages; And after, withe many a knyght Browght were where, as for that nyght,	<i>distress</i>
		<i>stirrings of the spirit</i>
		<i>[They] were brought</i>

<sup>1</sup> *And gave them tokens [of authentication] and good success*

*The Isle of Ladies*

- 2035 They parted not, for to pleasaunce  
 Consent was hart and countenaunce,  
 Bothe of the quene and my mistris:  
 This was that night ther busynes.  
 And one the morrowe, withe huge route —
- 2040 This prince — of lordes him abowte,  
 Come, and to my ladye sayd  
 That of her cominge glad and well appaide  
 He was, and full conninglye  
 Her thannked and full hertelye,  
 And lowghe, and smyled, and sayd, 'Iwis,  
 That was in dowbte in suerty es.'  
 And comaunde do dilygence,<sup>1</sup>  
 And spare for neyther golde ne spence,  
 But make redye; for, one the morrowe,  
 Weddid withe 'Seynt John to borowe'  
 He wold be, witheouten more;  
 And let them wytt them, lesse and more.<sup>2</sup>  
 The morowe come, and the service  
 Of marriage in suche wyse
- 2055 Sayd was, that with more honor  
 Was never prince ne conqueror  
 Wedd, ne withe suche compayne  
 Of gentulnes in chivalrye,  
 Ne of ladyes so great rowtes,  
 Ne so besene, as all abowghtes  
 They were there, I certefye  
 You and my lyffe, witheout lye.  
 And the feast helde was in tentes —  
 As to tell you myne intent is —
- 2060 In a rome, a large playne,  
 Under a wood in a champayne,  
 Betwene a ryver and a well,  
 Where never had abby ne sell  
 Ben, ne kyrke, house, ne village,
- pleased
- What; is now assured
- expense
- May St. John be my security
- fine-looking
- on my life
- great open space
- Close by; open meadow
- spring
- monastic cell

<sup>1</sup> Now gave command that all exert themselves

<sup>2</sup> And caused these things to be made known to everyone

*The Isle of Ladies*

- 2070 In tyme of any manes age. *man's  
lasted*  
 And dured thre monethes the feast  
 In one estate, and never ceste  
 From earlye the ryssinge of the sune  
 Till the daye spent was and rune,  
 2075 In justinge, dauncesinge, and lustines,  
 And all that sowned to gentulnes.<sup>1</sup>  
 And, as me thowght, the second morrowe,  
 When endid was all old sorrowe  
 And in suertye everye wight *in the security [of wedlock]*  
 2080 Had withe his ladye slepte a nyght,  
 The prince, the quene, and all the feast,  
 Unto my ladye made request,  
 And her besowght and ofte prayed  
 To mewardes to be well paied,  
 2085 And consyther myne olde trothe,  
 And one my paines to have rothe,  
 And me accepte to her service  
 In suche forme, and in suche wyse,  
 That we bothe myght be as one:  
 2090 Thus prayde the quene and everychone.  
 And for ther shuld be no 'naye,'  
 They stinte justinge all a daye *stopped*  
 To praye my ladye and requier  
 Be content and owt of feare, *[Her to] be*  
 2095 And withe good hart make frindlye chere,  
 And sayd yt was an happye yere.  
 At wiche she smyled and sayd, 'Iwys,  
 I trow well he my servante is,  
 And wold my welfare, as I trist.  
 2100 So wold I his, and wolde he wist  
 How, and I knew his trothe  
 Contynewe wold witheout slouthe  
 And be suche as ye here reporte,  
 Restraynyng bothe corrage and sport, *[he] desires; trust  
wished he knew  
How, if I knew*  
 2105 And couthe consent at youre request *free and wanton spirit*

<sup>1</sup> *And everything that was in accordance with gentilesse*

*The Isle of Ladies*

- To be named of your feast,  
And do so after your usaunce  
In obeyinge your pleasaunce;  
At your request, thus I consent  
2110 To please you in youre entent,  
As eke the soveraynge above  
Comaunded hathe me for to love  
And before other him prefarré,  
Agaynst wiche prince may be no warr,  
2115 For his power over all reynegthe,  
That other wold for nowght him paynethe.<sup>1</sup>  
And sythe his will and yours is one,  
Contrarye in me shal be none.'
- Tho, as me thowght, the promesse  
2120 Of marriage before the messe  
Desyred was — of every wight —  
To be made the same nyght,  
To put awaye all maner dowbtes  
Of everye wyght there abowtes;
- 2125 And so was do. And one the morrow,  
When every thowght and every sorrowe  
Dislodged was owt of myne harte,  
Withe everye wo and every smarte,  
Unto a tente the prince and princesse,
- 2130 Me thowght, me browght and my misteris,  
And sayd we were at full age  
Ther to conclud our marriage,  
Withe ladyes, knyghtes, and squiers,  
And a great hoost of mynistres  
2135 Withe instrumentes and soundes diverse,  
That longe were here you to reherse.  
Wiche tente was churche perochiall,  
Ordeyned it was in especiall  
For the feast and for the sacre,  
2140 Where arshebyshoppe and archedyaker  
Sunge full owt the service,
- named [as one]*  
*in what you purpose*  
*mass*  
*done; on*  
*mistress*  
*minstrels*  
*And this tent; parochial*  
*sacred ceremony*  
*archdeacon*  
*with full voice*

<sup>1</sup> *Anyone who desires aught else is exerting himself for nothing*

*The Isle of Ladies*

	After the custome and the gyse And the churches ordinaunce; And after that, to dyne and daunce	<i>fashion</i>
2145	Browght were we unto diverse pleyes. And, for oure sped, eache wihte prayse, And merrye was most and lest; And sayd amended was the feast And where right glad, ladye and lord,	<i>entertainments</i> <i>person prays</i>
2150	Of the marriage and th' accorde, And wished us hartes pleasaunce, Joye, hele, and continuaunce; And to the minsterelles made request	<i>were</i>
2155	That in increasyng of the feast Thay wold tuche ther cordes, And withe some newe joyeux accordes Meve the pepull to gladnes,	<i>to add to the pleasure of</i> <i>strings</i> <i>harmonies</i>
2160	And prayden of all gentulnes Eche to paine him, for the daye, To shew his conninge and his pleye.	<i>skill in playing</i>
2165	Tho begane sowndes marvelus, And intuned withe accordes joyeux, Rounde abowte all the tentes, Withe thousanndes of instrumentes,	<i>all in tune; harmonies</i>
2170	That everye wyght to daunce him pained, To be merye was none that fayned; Wiche so me trowbeled in my slepe, That from my bed forthe I lepe,	<i>leapt</i> <i>Thinking [I was]</i> <i>woke; ceased</i>
2175	Weninge to be at the feast. But when I wocke, all was ceaste. For ther was ladye, ne creature, Save one the walles old portraiture	<i>as if bitten</i>
	Of horsemen, hawkes, and houndes, And hurte deare full of woundes, Some lyke bytton, some hurtte with shott, And, as my dreme, semed that was not. <sup>1</sup>	

<sup>1</sup> *And, like my dream, it was all illusion*

*The Isle of Ladies*

- And when I wocke and knew the trothe,  
 Had ye sene, of verye rothe  
 I trow ye wold have wepte a wecke; *week*  
 2180 For never man yet halfe so sike  
 Escaped, I wene, withe the lyfe; *with his life*  
 And was for faute that sword ne knyfe *only for want*  
 I find myght, my lyve t' abrege, *shorten*  
 Ne thinge that carved, ne had edge,  
 Wherewithe I might my wofull peines  
 Have voyd withe bledinge of my veynes. *ended*  
 Lo, here my blysse! Lo, here my Payne!  
 Whiche to my lady I complayne,  
 And grace and mercy her requier,  
 2190 To ende my wo and besy fere, *urgent anxiety*  
 And me accepte to her service  
 After her pleasaunce, in suche wise  
 That of my dreame the substaunce  
 Might turne once to cognisaunce,<sup>1</sup> *absolute proof*  
 2195 And cognisaunce to very preve,  
 By full concent and good leave;  
 Or else, witheowten more, I pray  
 That this night, or yt be daye,  
 I mote unto my dreame retorne, *may*  
 2200 And slepinge so, forthe ay sojorne  
 Abowte the Ile of pleasaunce,  
 Under my ladyes obeysaunce, *rule*  
 In her service, and in suche wyse  
 As yt please her may to devise,  
 2205 And grace once to be accepte, *[be granted] grace one day*  
 Like as I dremed when I slepte,  
 And duer a thousannd yeres and tene *And [may I] endure; ten*  
 In His good grace. Amen. Amen.

EXPLICIT

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<sup>1</sup> *Might turn some day to acknowledgment of fact*

*The Isle of Ladies*

- 2210 Fayrest of fayer and goodleste on lyve,  
All my secre to you I playne and shreve,  
Requiringe grace, and of all my complainte  
To be heled, or martered as a saynt;  
For by my trothe I swere, and by this booke,  
Ye may bothe hele and slaye me with a looke.
- 2215 Go forthe myn owne trew harte innocent,  
And withe humblenesse do thine observaunce,  
And to thi lady on thi knes present  
Thi service new, and thinke how great plesaunce  
Hit is to lyve under the obeysaunce
- 2220 Of her, that may withe her lookes softe  
Geve the blisse that thou desyers ofte.
- 2225 Be diligent, awacke, obye, and dread,  
And not to wilde of thi countenaunce,  
But meke and glade, and thi nature fead  
To do eche thinge that may her plesaunce.  
When you shall slepe, have ay in remembraunce  
The image of her whiche may withe lookes softe  
Geve the blysse that thou desyers ofte.
- 2230 And yf so be that thou her name finde,  
Writton in booke or else uppon wall,  
Looke that thou do as servaunte trew and kynde  
Thine obeysaunce, as she were ther witheall.  
Fayninge in love is breadinge of a fall
- 2235 From the grace of her, whose lookes softe  
May geve the blisse that thou desyers ofte.

*alive*

*lament and confess*

*sway*

*too*

*nurture*

*may [give] her*

*obedient service*

*original source of*

FINIS

[Added in a different hand]

Ye that this balade rede shall,  
I pray you kepe you from the fall.

FINIS QUOD CHAUCER

### **Notes**

- 1-6 The reclothing of the bare earth after winter in the mantle of Flora is a common motif in the spring-opening (for which see *FL* 1-14).
- 10-14 It was not unusual for a beautiful lady to be described as a masterpiece of Nature's handiwork (e.g., Chaucer's description of Virginia in *The Physician's Tale*, VI.9), but God the Creator is not so commonly invoked. The daringly suggestive use of religious imagery and allusion in relation to sexual love, which was fraught with irony and a sense of dangerous transgression in the best of the earlier poetry (e.g., *Troilus and Criseyde*), seems to have declined here to a more straightforward conceit.
- 20 *huntinge* is often associated with love-visions, partly because of the opportunities it gives for allusion to the hounds of desire, wounded h(e)arts, etc. See 2172-76.
- 22 *halfe on slepe*. Medieval authorities on dreams thought that the moments between waking and slumber produced particularly vivid dreams.
- 25-31 *what I dreamed*. The idea that the dream was as real as real experience (see also 43-50) and occurred in a state not much different from waking is familiar in the discussions of dreams which frequently appear in dream-poems (e.g., Chaucer's *The House of Fame* 1-58).
- 35 *axes and heale*: one of the traditional paradoxes (cf. fire and freezing cold) of the oxymoron of love.
- 43-50 The assertion that the dream has an oracular significance, beyond that of a mere dream, echoes similar assertions in the *Romaunt of the Rose* 11-20, and of course Chauntecler's discussion of dreams in *The Nun's Priest's Tale*.

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- 54-55 There is a degree of sophisticated self-consciousness in the dreamer's recognition of the appropriateness of what he is doing to what is conventionally done.
- 60 *slepe wrightter*: 'sleep-writer' is rather charming, but it sounds modern, and one suspects that *slepe* is a form of or a mistake for *slepye* (the reading of the other manuscript of *IL*). The sense would not be 'somnolent' but 'sleeping' (note the contrast with *on that wakinge is* in line 62) or 'having to do with sleep.'
- 63-70 The apology for the writer's *boysteousnes* is a conventional 'modesty-topos,' employed with especial frequency by Lydgate; but it is unusual for the writer to suggest that he be excused because he is relating a dream, or that the reader should take no notice of his lack of skill (usually the reader is asked to emend or correct where he sees fit). As often, the tone suggests not ignorance of the conventions but a carelessly sophisticated mock-naiveté somewhat reminiscent of Chaucer.
- 71 *an ylle*. Courtly love-visions are occasionally located on islands, but paradisal islands inhabited only by women are particularly characteristic of the Celtic tradition of the 'maidenland' (see Daly, ed. *IL*, pp. 50-54).
- 72 *of glasse*. There are temples of glass in Chaucer's *The House of Fame* and of course in Lydgate's *Temple of Glass*, as also in Stephen Hawes's *Pastime of Pleasure*, which has many palaces like this one.
- 73 *closed*. Both the traditional garden of love (e.g., *Romaunt of the Rose* 138) and the allegorical garden of female chastity and beauty (as here, and in the *hortus conclusus* of the *Song of Songs*) are conventionally enclosed by a wall.
- 77 *fannes*: decorative weathervanes are a feature of late fifteenth-century palaces, both real and feigned (see *AL* 161). Musical weathervanes of solid gold, in thousands, with pairs of artificial singing birds set upon them, are a touch of fantasy (though they recall the hydraulically-operated birds that adorned the emperor's throne in Byzantium).

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- 81-84 The flowers carved on the towers, like other features of the palace, suggest both beauty and a degree of unnaturalness in the artifice, as may be appropriate to the allegory.
- 90 *all and womanhed*: an unusual phrase, but cf. 'all and some' (as in line 208).
- 116 *she nas younge*. There seems no particular reason in the allegory why the lady should be elderly; indeed she ought not to be, given the power of the three apples. There may be some allusion to real life, whether casual and general (she is a kind of governess to this troupe of girls) or covert and specific.
- 176 *Benedicite*. See *AL* 148n.
- 194-202 *Fortunes purveaunce*. The narrator hints here at a complaint against Fortune, for her fickle treatment of him, despite his truth (197), presumably in love. It is conventional, and has to do with what follows, but in relation to his arrival on the isle it is a little uncomplimentary to the ladies.
- 298 *all that vironed is withe see*: i.e., the whole world, which was represented in maps as a single land-mass surrounded by ocean, and not, of course, the Isle of the poem.
- 306 *in one clothinge*: may suggest a livery, or form of dress worn by all the members of a particular household.
- 331 *on a roche*. The location of the 'heavenly hermitage' is rather like the dwelling place of Fortune in the *Romaunt of the Rose* (5921), a rocky island way out in the sea.
- 340 *apples three*. The golden apples of the Hesperides, also the object of a quest, are the best known otherworldly apples, but the closest parallels are in Irish literature, from which Daly (ed. *IL*, p. 294) cites the story of the land of Emne, famous for its apple trees, a land of women where all live free from grief, sickness, and death.

### Notes

- 346    *nexst*. It is hard to see how the apple that is highest on the tree can be nearest (*nexst*) to the observer.
- 407    *leche*: a term usually thought appropriate to the relationship of a lady to her lover.
- 418    *our brother frinde*: ‘our brother’s friend.’ This can only refer to the dreamer, but the queen is not supposed to know at this point of the existence and presence of the dreamer.
- 436    *a world of ladyes*. Cf. *FL* 137.
- 463    *playe*. The playfulness is of course related to the delicacy of the commission and the entrusting of it to *the aged lady*, who will not be so much affected by its delicacy. This aged lady understands the implication, as we see by her smile (481).
- 520    *sowninge*. The swooning is a good sign: it indicates that the knight is truly noble and gentle at heart. It is not a sign of unmanly weakness, as modern readers often assume, for example in relation to Troilus’s swoon (*Troilus*, III.1092).
- 561-62    The queen’s anxiety is reminiscent of that of Criseyde in *Troilus*, II.459-62, and witnesses to a similar struggle between the restraint demanded by an honorable reputation and the fear that excessively severe behavior may do even more harm to that reputation. It is a classic little cameo of internal sentimental debate.
- 588    The knight’s speechlessness is like that of Troilus, when Criseyde comes to his bedside. Troilus, similarly, for all his prepared speeches, can manage only the reiterated cry for mercy (*Troilus*, III.98).
- 613    *To thi dishonour*. It will be to death’s dishonor if he dies since death prides himself on opposing man’s will to live.
- 619    His *cowardice* must be his unmanly behavior in trying to seize the queen by force (line 384).

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- 641 Cf. *Troilus*, II.541: 'And gan to motre, I noot what. . . .'
- 669-81 The queen's sympathy and care for the knight is richly balanced against her refusal to make any personal commitment to him other than that of womanly compassion.
- 708 *Aftercastelles*: refers to the elaborate wooden structures built high above deck, in this case aft (cf. forecastle), in ships of the late Middle Ages.
- 711 *toppes*: railed platforms at the head of a mast.
- 714 *Smale burdes*. The real birds that accompany Love's navy make a nice allegorical contrast with the artificial singing-birds that decorate the island-fortress of the ladies (line 78).
- 739 *good langauge*. In the past, pleasant noncommittal words have been enough to keep prospective suitors at bay, as we saw with the queen and the knight (569-82, 644-58).
- 751 *walles of glasse* are an insubstantial defense against the entry of love.
- 781-91 The portrayal of the God of Love, and especially of his fierce power to wound the heart, owes much to the *Roman de la Rose* (see *Romaunt*, especially 1723-29).
- 794 Note the use of the second person singular pronoun in this speech, implying the close relationship of lord to servant. Elsewhere in the poem the more polite and formal second person plural is used, except in the knight's apostrophe to death (607-17), where the singular is suggestive of contempt, and the poet's address to his heart (2215-35), where it conveys intimacy.
- 816 *his owne lodginge*. Pity's natural dwelling-place is the lady's heart, as medieval poets reiterate constantly.
- 834 *by requeste*. There is an explicit contrast between what the God of Love commands of others and what he requests of the poet's lady.
- 838 *consentes*: the Northern dialectal form of the imperative plural.

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- 866 *that mightye saynte*. The God of Love is called *Seynt Amour* in the *Romaunt of the Rose* 6781. The poet of *IL* does not make much of these religious associations (see 10n); he treats the God of Love more as a feudal lord than as a divinity.
- 888 *So thowght I*. This introduces the alternative to the first, more cheerful thought of line 883 (*as I thowght*).
- 902 *the yere of grace*. A play on words: the ‘year of grace’ is when he will win his lady’s favor; it is also a form of reference to the year in the Christian era, *anno gratiae* (cf. *anno domini*).
- 920 *A byll*. For a discussion of such bills and their presence in poems of this kind see *AL* 325n.
- 943 *his sleve*. The capacious hanging sleeves that were part of the fashionable costume of the time must have been very handy on occasions such as these.
- 952 *flowers*. The wearing of flowers, especially chaplets of flowers, was commonly associated with the service of love. See *Romaunt of the Rose* 887-917. *FL* has some variations on the convention.
- 973 *old romansys*. The reading of romances is an aristocratic pastime frequently alluded to in love-poetry. So Pandarus composes himself ‘as for to looke upon an old romaunce’ (*Troilus*, III.980), and the narrator of *The Book of the Duchess* bids one pass him a book, a ‘romaunce,’ to ‘drive the night away’ (47-49). See here, 977.
- 979 *the spere*: that one of the concentric spheres surrounding the earth in which the sun was fixed and which caused the sun’s (apparent) movement.
- 990 *up in the eyer*: presumably upon some raised platform or scaffold, such as would be erected for a tournament, as in *The Knight’s Tale*, I.2533.
- 1097 The *statutes* of the God of Love are frequently alluded to, as in the classic text, the *De Arte Honeste Amandi* of the late twelfth-century Andreas Capellanus, or in the *Romaunt of the Rose* 2175 ff., where Love gives his ‘comaunderementis’ (2137), or, more playfully, in the early sixteenth-century

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Chaucerian pastiche, *The Court of Love*. There are some examples of love's commandments in the present poet's Envoy to his heart (2215-35).

- 1150     *as wood man*. These lines (1150-66) allegorize the stifling feeling of panic that the lover experiences at the fear of losing his lady.
- 1153-54 *wave: overthrowghe*. The original rhyme must have been *wave: overthrawe*, the latter form one of several indications of the northern or north midland provenance of the original poet.
- 1167     *my testament*. Troilus likewise advises Pandarus of his funeral arrangements when he fears he has lost his lady (*Troilus*, V.295-315).
- 1195     *of her apples*. This is the second time the lady has used one of her apples (cf. 401) for purposes of resuscitation. *in my sleeve*. See 943n.
- 1209     *He that all joyes*, etc. Such references are commonly ambiguous in love-poetry, but here the allusion is clearly (see line 1216) to the Creator, not the God of Love.
- 1242     *on consyte*. The phrase is problematic, and the interpretation offered here, taking *consyte* as a form of *conceit* (opinion, view), is one of a number of possibilities.
- 1301-49 The waking from the dream in the smoke-filled room, the change of location and return to the dream are an unusual and effective device for renewing the impetus and interest of the narrative. Only *Piers Plowman* comes to mind as a poem which makes similar use of connected but separate dreams (eight in number, in that case).
- 1324     *a chaumbre painte*. Rooms decorated with narrative wall-paintings are a favorite feature of love-vision poems. See *AL* 456n. For their significance here, see 2172-74.
- 1377     In speaking of the *barge of manes thowght*, the poet is making an explicit allegory of one of the most universal of metaphors for the inner life of thought and imagination: the opening lines of Dante's *Purgatorio*, or of

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Book II of *Troilus*, are famous examples, as is the Petrarch sonnet adapted by Sir Thomas Wyatt in 'My galley charged with forgetfulness.'

1379-80 The allegorical suggestion here is that the queen is active in the knight's inner life.

1381 *nether mast ne rother*. Rudderless boats are common in folk-literature, and are especially associated with journeys to the otherworld in Celtic tradition.

1505-06 Failure to keep to the letter a promise to return to one's lady by a set date was a mortal sin in love-romance. Chrétien's *Yvain* spends the greater part of the romance of *Yvain* regretting and expiating just such a failure. Here the knight could hardly complain that the matter was not made quite clear (1361-72). More generally, plots that rely on the consequences of the violation of a prohibition are very common in folk-literature.

1555-65 The boat's miraculous capacity: Daly (ed. *IL*, pp. 313-14) compares the story of the shirt of Joseph of Arimathaea in Robert de Boron's *History of the Holy Grail* (translated into English in the early fifteenth century by Henry Lovelich), in which 150 sail to Britain.

1571 *sayd was the crede*. It was customary to offer prayers for a safe voyage before setting out.

1674 *an open weye*. The phrase has a strong suggestion of female promiscuity, explicit in the proverb alluded to in *Piers Plowman*, C.III.167, where the maiden Meed is 'As comyn as the cartway to knaves and to alle.'

1679-80 *thrise . . . twise*. What looks like an arcane bit of administrative detail is certainly due, like much in the poem, to nothing more than the exigencies of rhyme.

1799 *nonnes . . . blacke*: an abbey of Benedictine nuns.

1864 *An erb*. The most striking analogue for this episode is in the *Lai d'Eliduc* of Marie de France (twelfth century), where a dead weasel is restored to life by its mate with a magic plant. The plant is then used to revive the maiden Guillardon. The motif of an animal reviving its companion or mate with a

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magic herb is widespread, especially in Celtic tradition, as in *Marie*. The animals are most often snakes.

- 1917 *of ther lord*. Presumably the sight of the lady brings to the minds of the assembled company (mostly the knight's retinue, since the ladies are all dead or dying) the sad fate of their lord.
- 1923 *Thre*. The bird sang *thre songes* (1832), and so there are three *greynes*. The scene is reminiscent of The Prioress's Tale, where the *greyn* on his tongue keeps the child miraculously alive after his throat has been cut.
- 1939 The queen takes over the role of the abbess, and thus acts out literally her metaphorical role as *leche* to the knight.
- 1955 *of ladyes . . . a rowte*. The *two partes* (two thirds) of the ladies who died (1649-52) are now restored to life.
- 1974 *parlament*. For the difference between an *assemble* (1971) and a *parlament*, see *AL* 720n.
- 2050 *Seynt John to borowe*: a formulaic prayer to ward off bad luck, as at leavetaking or the making of promises. Cf. The Squire's Tale, V.596.
- 2063 *in tentes*. Great outdoor feasts were commonly held in tented pavilions.
- 2111 *the soveraynge above*: i.e., the God of Love, whose commands to the lady were outlined in 803-77.
- 2113 *him*: i.e., the dreamer.
- 2137 *churche perochiall*. The dreamer's care to affirm that he was married, in his dream, in a tent which was actually his own proper parish church, is of a piece, in its wry pragmatism, with the frustration he accepts in being the only one who does not get to sleep with his lady.
- 2167 The moment of sudden waking is often carefully prepared for in dream-poems (see *AL* 726n), and the noise of singing and music is a frequent motif in such awakenings, as in Lydgate's *Temple of Glass*. Here the noise of

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music at the wedding disturbs the dreamer's sleep, and it is natural that he should wish to be present in person at his own marriage feast.

2172 For the appropriateness of such hunting-scenes to the lover's situation, see 20n.

2187 *Lo, here . . . Lo, here*: echoes *Troilus*, V.1849-55.

2194-95 *cognisaunce . . . preve*. There is a legal conceit here, alluding to the difference between acknowledgement of an alleged fact and the evidential demonstration of its truth.

2208 *His*. Other texts and editors have *her*, which makes better sense, but is clearly not a harder reading, and thus may be one that a scribe may well have preferred. The sense of 'His' would be rather audacious: that dwelling in his lady's grace would be to dwell also in God's.

2209-35 For his Envoy, or epilogue, the poet turns from the octosyllabic couplet to the pentameter, as do Gower and Lydgate on similar occasions. The first stanza, addressed to the lady, is a sixain in couplets, and is independent in both dramatic and metrical form from the rest. The other three stanzas are in rhyme royal, with repeated last line as in the true envoy, and are addressed to his heart. There is no reason to think that lines 2209-35 were not part of the original poem of *IL*.

2215 *Go forthe*. The apostrophe in such epilogues is usually to the poet's *litel bok* (as in *Troilus*, V.1786). The poet here works a rather neat variation on the convention, apostrophizing his heart and swearing upon his book as if it were a bible.

2226 *you*. The appropriateness of the use of the second person singular in the poet's address to his heart has been noted (794n). It is hard to tell whether this anomalous *you* is the poet's or the scribe's slip.

2233-35 The religious allusion is nicely pointed: falsehood leads to a fall from grace which loses the promise of bliss.

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- 2237 *fall*: i.e., the fall from grace mentioned in 2233. These last two lines, though they appear in all three early texts, are very probably a spurious addition. The hand that adds the final hopeful attribution (only in the Longleat manuscript) has also crossed out the earlier *Finis*.

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## *Glossary*

<b>afor(n)e</b> <i>before</i>	<b>chere</b> <i>face, demeanor, manner, expression, disposition</i>
<b>after, aftir</b> <i>after, according to</i>	<b>com(en)</b> <i>came</i>
<b>agayne, ageyne</b> <i>see ayen, ayenst</i>	<b>con</b> <i>see can</i>
<b>al, alle</b> <i>all</i>	<b>coninge, connynge</b> <i>skill, knowledge, courtesy</i>
<b>anon(e), annon(e)</b> <i>soon, straightway</i>	<b>con(n)inglye</b> <i>wisely, politely, skillfully</i>
<b>appaide, appayed</b> <i>pleased</i>	<b>coud</b> <i>could</i>
<b>avise, advise</b> <i>consider, advise, look at, look around</i>	<b>couth(e), cothe, cuthe</b> <i>could, knew, knew how to</i>
<b>avised</b> (past participle) <i>determined, resolved, advised (as in well-advised)</i>	<b>cowde, culd</b> <i>could</i>
<b>ayen, agayne(s), ageyne(s)</b> <i>again, in reply</i>	<b>deale, dele, dell, every dele</b> <i>part, bit, portion, every bit, thoroughly</i>
<b>ayenst, agayne(s), ageyne(s)</b> <i>against, to meet</i>	<b>devise</b> <i>describe, imagine, conceive, relate</i>
<b>bare, bere</b> <i>bore</i>	<b>dewer</b> <i>see duer</i>
<b>be</b> <i>by</i>	<b>do(n)</b> (past participle) <i>done</i>
<b>be(n)</b> (present plural) <i>are</i>	<b>doubt(e), dout(e), dowbt(e), dowt</b> <i>fear, doubt</i>
<b>be(n)</b> (past participle) <i>been</i>	<b>duer, dure, dewer</b> <i>endure, last, survive</i>
<b>ben(e)</b> (infinitive) <i>be</i>	<b>dyvers</b> <i>various, different</i>
<b>bien</b> <i>be, are</i>	
<b>by and by</b> <i>in succession, one by one, point by point</i>	<b>ech(e)</b> <i>each</i>
	<b>ech(e)on(e)</b> <i>each one, every one</i>
<b>cace, case</b> <i>case, matter, affair</i>	<b>eke, eak</b> <i>also</i>
<b>can(e), con(e)</b> <i>is able to, can; also as auxiliary for preterite (=did)</i>	<b>ensure</b> <i>assure</i>
<b>cauled</b> (past participle) <i>called</i>	<b>entent(e)</b> <i>purpose, mind</i>
<b>certayne, certeyne, sertayne, for certayne, in certayne</b> <i>certainly, truly, indeed</i>	<b>even</b> <i>right, immediately</i>
<b>chekes</b> <i>cheeks</i>	<b>everich(on), everichone, everychone</b> <i>every one, each one</i>
	<b>eyne</b> <i>eyes</i>

## Glossary

<b>faine, fayne</b>	<i>glad, gladly</i>	<b>hye</b>	<i>high</i>
<b>faute, feaute</b>	<i>fault, defect</i>	<b>iwis</b>	<i>indeed</i>
<b>fayer</b>	<i>fair</i>	<b>joyeuse, joyeux, joyoux</b>	<i>joyful</i>
<b>fer(re)</b>	<i>far, afar</i>	<b>knene</b>	<i>knees</i>
<b>fere, feere, feare</b>	<i>fellowship, company</i>	<b>know(e)</b>	<i>known</i>
<b>in fere</b>	<i>in company, together, as well, completely</i>	<b>late</b>	<i>let</i>
<b>feyre</b>	<i>fair</i>	<b>laurer, laurey</b>	<i>laurel</i>
<b>fil</b>	<i>fell</i>	<b>leche</b>	<i>physician (leech); see notes to IL 407 and 1939</i>
<b>flour(es)</b>	<i>flower(s)</i>	<b>leke, liche, lyke</b>	<i>like, alike, as if</i>
<b>fore</b>	<i>for</i>	<b>lenger</b>	<i>longer</i>
<b>fro</b>	<i>from</i>	<b>lest(e)</b>	<i>least</i>
<b>ful(l)</b>	<i>very</i>	<b>list</b>	<i>wished</i>
<b>furth</b>	<i>forth, further, onward</i>	<b>list (him)</b>	<i>it pleased (him)</i>
<b>gan</b>	<i>began (but shading off to did)</i>	<b>lite(l)</b>	<i>little</i>
<b>gefe, geve</b>	<i>give</i>	<b>lusty(e)</b>	<i>happy, pleasant, pleasure-loving, lively, vigorous</i>
<b>go</b>	<i>gone</i>	<b>lyves</b>	<i>alive, living</i>
<b>grete</b>	<i>great, greatly</i>	<b>maner(e)</b>	<i>kind (of), way</i>
<b>hard, herd</b>	<i>heard</i>	<b>matere, matier(e)</b>	<i>matter, affair, business, suit, petition</i>
<b>heale, hele</b>	<i>health, happiness, well-being</i>	<b>mede</b>	<i>meadow</i>
<b>hede</b>	<i>head</i>	<b>moche</b>	<i>much</i>
<b>hem</b>	<i>them</i>	<b>mo(o)</b>	<i>more, others</i>
<b>her, hir</b>	<i>their</i>	<b>mot(e)</b>	<i>must</i>
<b>herber</b>	<i>arbor</i>	<b>myddes</b>	<i>midst</i>
<b>here</b>	<i>hear</i>	<b>nat</b>	<i>not</i>
<b>hether</b>	<i>hither</i>	<b>ne</b>	<i>not, nor</i>
<b>hew</b>	<i>hue</i>	<b>nede, nead(e)</b>	<i>need, of necessity</i>
<b>hie, hye</b>	<i>high</i>	<b>nie, nye</b>	<i>nigh, nearly</i>
<b>hight</b>	<i>is called</i>	<b>nist, nyst</b>	<i>did not know</i>
<b>hir</b>	<i>her; their</i>		
<b>hol(e), holl(e)</b>	<i>whole, entire; hole the all of the</i>		
<b>hole, holl, holly(e)</b>	<i>wholly, entirely</i>		
<b>hond</b>	<i>hand</i>		
<b>horse</b>	<i>horse, horses, horse's</i>		

## Glossary

**o, oo, oon** *one, a single, the same*  
**obessiaunce, obeysaunce** *obedience, submission, sway, rule*  
**ones** *once*  
**or** *ere, before*  
**ordinaunce** *command, decree*  
  
**paide, paied, payed** *pleased, contented, satisfied*  
**passyng** *very, extremely*  
**petye** *pity*  
**playe, pleye** *speak or act playfully, amuse oneself*  
**prayed** *invited*  
**pres, presse** *crowd, throng*  
**purfil, purfyll** *embroidered or furred hem of garment*  
  
**quod** *said*  
  
**rede** *read, advise*  
**reherce, reherse** *recount, tell (of), repeat*  
**reme** *realm*  
**right** *entirely, very, very much*  
**rothe, routhe, rowth** *pity*  
**route, rowte** *company*  
  
**sad(d)** *steadfast, serious, sober*  
**san(n)de** *see sonde*  
**se** *see*  
**se, see, sie** *(past tense) saw*  
**sene** *(infinitive) see*  
**sertayne** *see certayne*  
**sewe, sue** *sue, make petition, present (a petition)*  
**seyne** *(past participle) seen*  
**shul** *shall*

**sie** *(past tense) saw*  
**silf** *self*  
**sith(e), sythe** *since*  
**sonde, sannde** *beach*  
**song** *(past tense) sang*  
**soth** *true, truth*  
**soth(e)ly, soothly** *truly, indeed*  
**space** *while*  
**sute** *suit, matching kind*  
  
**than** *then*  
**that** *what, whatever, that which*  
**the** *thee*  
**then** *than*  
**ther(e)** *their*  
**theyr** *there*  
**tho** *then*  
**tho** *those*  
**thorow, thurgh** *through, throughout, thorough(ly)*  
**thought** *(in me thought) it seemed to me, I thought*  
**til** *to*  
**to** *too*  
**to** *till, until*  
**togider, togyder, togydre** *together*  
**travayle, travell** *labor, hard work*  
**trow(e)** *believe*  
  
**uncoth(e)** *strange, unfamiliar, marrvellous, curious*  
**un(n)ethe** *hardly, scarcely*  
**until** *unto, to*  
  
**veluet** *velvet*  
**very, verray** *very, true, genuine, absolute*  
**viage, vioage** *journey*

## *Glossary*

**ware** *aware*  
**ware, were** *wore*  
**wele** *well*  
**wele, welle** *happiness, well-being*  
**wene** (past tense *wened, wend*) *think,*  
    *imagine, suppose*  
**were** *wore*  
**wete(n)** *know*  
**wex** *grew, became*  
**whan** *when*  
**what** *whatever*  
**wheche, wiche** *which*  
**wight** *person, creature, man, one*  
**wise, wyse** *manner, way, kind, kinds*  
    *(of)*  
**wit(e)** *know*  
**wol(l)** *will, want (to)*  
**wold** *would, wished, wanted to*  
**wonder** (adverb) *wonderfully, very,*  
    *extremely*  
**word(e)** *motto*  
**wot(e), wotte** *know, knows*  
**wox(e)** *grew, became*  
**wyt** *know*

**y** *I*  
**ya(a)te** *gate*  
**yave** *gave*  
**yche** *each*  
**yede(n)** *went*  
**yef** *if*  
**yeve** *give(n)*  
**yis** *yes*  
**yit** *yet*  
**yle, ylle** *isle*