THE PROEM

1  I have gret wonder, be this lighte,
2   How that I live, for day ne nighte
3  I may nat slepe wel nigh noght,
4  I have so many an ydel thought
5   Purely for defaute of slepe
6   That, by my trouthe, I take no kepe
7  Of no-thing, how hit cometh or goth,
8   Ne me nis no-thing leef nor loth.
9   Al is y-liche good to me --
10  Ioye or sorowe, wherso hyt be --
11  For I have feling in no-thinge,
12   But, as it were, a mased thing,
13   Alway in point to falle a-doun;
14   For sorwful imaginacioun
15   Is alway hoolly in my minde.
16  And wel ye wite, agaynes kynde
17   Hit were to liven in this wyse;
18   For nature wolde nat suffye
19   To noon erthely creature
20   Not longe tyme to endure
21   Withoute slepe, and been in sorwe;
22   And I ne may, ne night ne morwe,
23   Slepe; and thus melancolye
24   And dreed I have for to dye,
25   Defaute of slepe and hevinesse
26   Hath sleyn my spirit of quiknesse,
27   That I have lost al lustihede.
Suche fantasies ben in myn hede
So I not what is best to do.
But men myght axe me, why soo
I may not slepe, and what me is?
But natheles, who aske this
Leseth his asking trewely.
My-selven can not telle why
The sooth; but trewely, as I gessc,
I holde hit be a siknesse
That I have suffred this eight yere,
And yet my bote is never the nere;
For ther is phisicien but oon,
That may me hele; but that is doon.
Passe we over until eft;
That wil not be, moot nede be left;
Our first matere is good to kepe.
So whan I saw I might not slepe,
Til now late, this other night,
Upon my bedde I sat upright
And bad oon reche me a book,
A romaunce, and he hit me took
to rede and dryve the night away;
For me thoghte it better play
And in this boke were writen fables
That clerkes hadde, in olde tyme,
And other poets, put in ryme
To rede, and for to be in minde
Whyl men loved the lawe of kinde.
This book ne spak but of such thinges,
Of quenes lyves, and of kinges,
And many othere thinges smale.
Amonge al this I fond a tale
That me thoughte a wonder thing.
This was the tale: There was a king
That hight Seys, and hadde a wyf,
The beste that mighte bere lyf;
And this quene hight Alcyone.
So hit befel, therafter sone,
This king wolde wenden over see.
To tellen shortly, whan that he
That brak hir mast, and made it falle,
And clefte her ship, and dreinte hem alle,
That never was founden, as it telles,
Bord ne man, ne nothing elles.
Right thus this king Seys loste his lyf.
Now for to speken of his wife: --
This lady, that was left at home,
Hath wonder, that the king ne come
Hoom, for hit was a longe terme.
Anon her herte gan to erme;
And for that hir thoughte evermo
Hit was not wel he dwelte so,
She longed so after the king
That certes, hit were a pitous thing
To telle hir hertely sorwful lyf
That hadde, alas! this noble wyfe;
For him she loved alderbest.
88 Anon she sente bothe eest and west
89 To seke him, but they founde nought.
90 ‘Alas!’ quoth she, ‘that I was wrought!
91 And wher my lord, my love, be deed?
92 Certes, I nil never ete breed,
93 I make a-vowe to my god here,
94 But I mowe of my lord here’!
95 Such sorwe this lady to her took
96 That trewely I, which made this book,
97 Had swich pite and swich rowthe
98 To rede hir sorwe, that, by my trowthe,
99 I ferde the worse al the morwe
100 After, to thenken on her sorwe.
101 So whan she coude here no word
102 That no man mighte fynde hir lord,
103 Ful ofte she swouned, and saide ‘Alas’!
104 For sorwe ful nigh wood she was,
105 Ne she coude no reed but oon;
106 But doun on knees she sat anoon,
107 And weep, that pite was to here.
108 ‘A! mercy! swete lady dere!’
109 Quod she to Iuno, hir goddesse;
110 ‘Help me out of this distresse,
111 And yeve me grace my lord to see
112 Sone, or wite wher-so he be,
113 Or how he fareth, or in what wyse,
114 And I shal make you sacrificye,
115 And hoolly youres become I shal
116 With good wil, body, herte, and al;
117 And but thou wilt this, lady swete,
118 Send me grace to slepe, and mete
119 In my slepe som certeyn sweven,
120 Wher-through that I may knownen even
121 Whether my lord be quik or deed.’
122 With that word she heng doun the heed,
123 And fil a-swown as cold as ston;
124 Hir women caught her up anon,
125 And broghten hir in bed al naked,
126 And she, forweped and forwaked,
127 Was wery, and thus the dede sleep
128 Fil on hir, or she toke keep,
129 Through Iuno, that had herd hir bone,
130 That made hir to slepe sone;
131 For as she prayde, so was don,
132 In dede; for Iuno, right anon,
133 Called thus her messagere
134 To do her erande, and he com nere.
135 Whan he was come, she bad him thus:
136 ‘Go bet,’ quod Iuno, ‘to Morpheus,
137 Thou knowest hym wel, the god of sleep;
138 Now understond wel, and tak keep.
139 Sey thus on my halfe, that he
140 Go faste into the grete see,
141 And bid him that, on alle thing,
142 He take up Seys body the king,
143 That lyth ful pale and no-thing rody.
144 Bid him crepe into the body,
145 Aud do it goon to Alcyone
146 The quene, ther she lyth alone,
147 And shewe hir shortly, hit is no nay,
How hit was dreynt this other day;
And do the body speke so
Right as hit was wont to do,
The whyles that hit was on lyve.
Go now faste, and hy thee blyve!
This messager took leve and wente
Upon his wye, and never ne stente
Til he cor to the derke valeye
That stant bytwene roches tweye,
Ther never yet grew corn ne gras,
Ne tree, ne nothing that ought was,
Save ther were a fewe welles
Came remning fro the cliffs adoun,
That made a deedly sleeping soun,
And ronnen doun right by a cave
That was under a rokke y-grave
Amid the valey, wonder depe.
Ther thise goddes laye and slepe,
Morpheus, and Eclympasteyre,
That was the god of slepes heyre,
That slepe and did non other werk.
This cave was also as derk
As helle pit over-al aboute;
They had good leyser for to route
To envye, who might sleepe beste;
Some henge hir chin upon hir breste
And sleepe upright, hir heed y-hed,
And some laye naked in hir bed,
And sleepe whyles the dayes laste.
This messager come flying faste,
And cryed, 'O ho! awake anon!'
Hit was for noght; ther herde him non.
'A wak!' quod he, 'who is, lyth there?'
And blew his horn right in hir ere,
And cryed 'awaketh!' wonder hye.
This god of sleepe, with his oon ye
Cast up, axed, 'who clepeth there?'
'Hit am I,' quod this messagere;
'luno bad thou shuldest goon' --
And tolde him what he shulde doon
As I have told yow here-tofore;
Hit is no need reherse hit more;
And wente his wye, whan he had sayd.
Anon this god of sleepe a-brayd
Out of his sleepe, and gan to goon,
And did as he had bede him doon;
Took up the dreynte body sone,
And bar hit forth to Alcyone,
His wif the quene, ther-as she lay,
Right even a quarter before day,
And stood right at hir beddes fete,
And called hir, right as she hete,
By name, and sayde, 'my swete wyf,
Awak! let be your sorwful lyf!
For in your sorwe there lyth no reed;
For certes, swete, I nam but deed;
Ye shul me never on lyve y-see.
But good swete herte, look that ye
Bury my body, at whiche a tyde.
Ye mowe hit finde the see besyde;
And far-wel, swete, my worldes blisse!
I praye god your sorwe lisse;
To litel whyl our blisse lasteth!'
With that hir eyen up she casteth,
And saw noght; 'A!' quod she, 'for sorwe!'
And deyed within the thridde morwe.
But what she sayde more in that saww
I may not telle yow as now;
Hit were to longe for to dwelle;
My first matere I wil yow telle,
Wherfor I have told this thing
Of Alcione and Seys the king.
For thus moche dar I saye wel,
I had be dolven everydell,
And deed, right through defaute of sleep,
If I nad red and taken keep
Of this tale next before;
And I wol telle yow wherfore:
For I ne might, for bote ne bale,
Slepe, or I had red this tale
Of this dreynte Seys the king,
And of the goddes of sleping.
When I had red this tale wel
And over-loked hit everydel,
Me thoughte wonder if hit were so;
For I had never herd speke, or tho,
Of no goddes that coude make
Men for to slepe, ne for to wake;
For I ne knew never god but oon.
And in my game I sayde anoon --
And yet me list right evel to pleye --
'Rather then that I shulde deye
Through defaute of sleping thus,
I wolde yive thilke Morpheus,
Or his goddesse, dame Iuno,
Or som wight elles, I ne roghte who --
To make me slepe and have som reste --
I wil yive him the alder-beste
If I wiste wher were his cave,
If he can make me slepe sone,
As did the goddesse Alcione.
And thus this ilke god, Morpheus,
May winne of me mo fees thus
Than ever he wan; and to luno,
That is his goddesse, I shal so do,
I trow that she shal holde her payd.
I hadde unneth that word y-sayd
Right thus as I have told hit yow,
That sodeynly, I niste how,
Swich a lust anoon me took
To slepe, that right upon my book
I fil aslepe, and therwith even
Me mette so inly swete a sweven,
So wonderful, that never yit
I trowe no man hadde the wit
To conne wel my sweven rede;
No, not Ioseph, withoute drede,
Of Egipte, he that redde so
The kings meting Pharao,
No more than coude the lest of us;
Ne nat scarsly Macrobeus,
(He that wroot al thavisioun
That he mette, Kyng Scipioun,
The noble man, the Affrican --
Swiche marvayles fortuned than)
I trowe, a-rede my dremes even.

THE DREAM

Me thoughte thus: -- that hit was May,
And in the dawning ther I lay,
Me mette thus, in my bed al naked: --
I loked forth, for I was waked
With smale foules a gret hepe,
That had affrayed me out of slepe
Through noyse and sweetnesse of hir song;
And, as me mette, they sate among,
Upon my chambre-roof withoute,
Upon the tyles, al a-boute,
And songen, everich in his wise,
The moste solempne servyse
By note, that ever man, I trowe,
Had herd; for som of hem song lowe,
Som hye, and al of oon acorde.
To telle shortly, at oo worde,
Was never y-herd so swete a steven,
But hit had be a thing of heven; --
So mery a soun, so swete entunes,
That certes, for the toune of Tewnes,
I nolde but I had herd hem singe,
For al my chambr gan to ringe
Through singing of hir armony.
For instrument nor melodye
Was nowher herd yet half so swete,
Nor of acorde half so mete;
For ther was noon of hem that feyned
To singe, for ech of hem him peyned
To finde out mery crafty notes;
They ne spared not hir throtes.
And, sooth to seyn, my chambr was
Ful wel depeynted, and with glas
Were al the windowes wel y-glased,
Ful clere, and nat an hole y-crased,
That to beholde hit was gret loye.
For hooly al the storie of Troye
Was in the glasing y-wroght thus,
Of Ector and of king Priamus,
Of Achilles and king Lamedon,
Of Medea and of Iason,
Of Paris, Eleyne, and Lavyne.
And alle the walles with colours fyne
Were peynted, bothe text and glose,
Of al the Romaunce of the Rose.
My windowes weren shet echon,
And through the glas the sunne shon
Upon my bed with brighte bemes,
With many glade gilden stremes;
And eek the welken was so fair,
Blew, bright, clere was the air,
And ful atempre, for sothe, hit was;
For nother cold nor hoot hit nas,
Ne in al the welken was a cloude.
And as I lay thus, wonder loude
Me thoughte I herde an hunte blowe
Tassaye his horn, and for to knowe
Whether hit were clere or hors of soune.
I herde goinge, up and doune,
Men, hors, houndes, and other thing;
And al men spoken of hunting,
How they wolde slee the hert with strengthe,
And how the hert had, upon lengthe,
So moche embosed, I not now what.
Anon-right, whan I herde that,
How that they wolde on hunting goon,
I was right glad, and up anoon;
I took my hors, and forth I wente
Out of my chambre; I never stente
Til I com to the feld withoute.
Ther overtook I a gret route
Of huntes and eek of foresteres,
With many relayes and lymeres,
And hyed hem to the forest faste,
And I with hem; -- so at the laste
I asked oon, ladde a lymere: --
'Say, felow, who shal hunten here'
Quod I, and he answerde ageyn,
'Sir, temperour Octovien,'
Quod he, 'and is heer faste by.'
'A goddes halfe, in good tyme,' quod I,
'Go we faste!' and gan to ryde.
When we came to the forest-syde,
Every man dide, right anoon,
As to hunting fil to doon.
The mayster-hunte anoon, fot-hoot,
With a gret horne blew three moot
At the uncoupling of his houndes.
Within a whyl the hert y-founde is,
Y-halowed, and rechased faste
Longe tyme; and so at the laste,
This hert rused and stal away
Fro alle the houndes a prevy way.
The houndes had overshote hem alle,
And were on a defaute y-falle;
Therwith the hunte wonder faste
Blew a forloyn at the laste.

I was go walked fro my tree,
And as I wente, ther cam by me
A whelp, that fauned me as I stood,
That hadde y-folowed, and coude no good.

Hit com and creep to me as lowe,
Right as hit hadde me y-knowe,
Hild doun his heed and loyned his eres,
And leyde doun his heres.

Hit fledde, and was fro me goon;
And I him folwed, and hit forth wente
Doun by a floury grene wente
Ful thikke of gras, ful softe and swete,
With floures fele, faire under fete,
And litel used, hit seemed thus;
For bothe Flora and Zephirus,
They two that make floures growe,
Had mad hir dwelling ther, I trowe;
For hit was, on to beholde,
As thogh the erthe envy wolde
to be gayer than the heven,
To have mo floures, swiche seven
As in the welken sterres be.

Hit had forgete the povertee
That winter, through his colde morwes,
Had mad hit suffren, and his sorwes;
Al was forgotten, and that was sene.
For al the wode was waxen grene,
Ful swetness of dewe had mad it waxe.
Hit is no need eek for to axe
Wher ther were many grene greves,
Or thikke of trees, so ful of leves;
And every tree stood by him-selve
Fro other wel ten foot or twelve.
So grete trees, so huge of strengthe,
Of fourty or fifty fadme lengthe,
Clene withoute bough or stikke,
With croppes brode, and eek as thikke --
They were nat an inche a-sonder --
That hit was shadowe over-al under;
And many an hert and many an hinde
Was both before me and bihinde.
Of founes, soures, bukkes, does
Was ful the wode, and many roes,
And many squirelles that sete
Ful hye upon the trees, and ete,
And in hir maner made festes.
Shortly, hit was so ful of bestes,
That thogh Argus, the noble countour,
Sete to rekene in his countour,
And rekened with his figures ten --
For by tho figures mowe al ken,
If they be crafty, rekene and noumbre,
Yet shulde he fayle to rekene even
The wondres, me mette in my sweven.
But forth they romed wonder faste
Doun the wode; so at the laste
I was war of a man in blak,
That sat and had y-turned his bak
To an oke, an huge tree.
'Lord,' thoghte I, 'who may that be?
What ayleth him to sitten here?'
Anoon-right I wente nere;
Than fond I sitte even upright
A wonder wel-faringe knight --
By the maner me thoughte so --
Of good mochel, and yong thereto,
Of the age of four and twenty yeer.
Upon his berde but litel heer,
And he was clothed al in blakke.
I stalked even unto his bakke,
And ther I stood as stille as ought,
That, sooth to saye, he saw me nought,
For-why he heng his heed adoune.
And with a deedly sorwful soune
He made of ryme ten vers or twelve
Of a compleynt to him-selve,
The moste pite, the moste rowthe,
That ever I herde; for, by my trowthe,
Hit was gret wonder that nature
Might suffren any creature
To have swich sorwe, and be not deed.
Ful pitous, pale, and nothing reed,
He sayde a lay, a maner song,
Withoute note, withoute song,
And hit was this; for wel I can
Reherse hit; right thus hit began. --
'I have of sorwe so grete woon,
That Ioye gete I never noon,
Now that I see my lady bright,
Which I have loved with al my might,
Is fro me dedd, and is a-goon.
And thus in sorwe lefte me alone.
'Allas, o deeth! what ayleth thee,
Whan that thou toke my lady swete?
That was so fayr, so fresh, so free,
So good, that men may wel y-see
'Of al goodnesse she had no mete!' --
When he had mad thus his complaynte,
His sorwful herte gan faste faynte,
And his spirites wexen dede;
The blood was fled, for pure drede,
Doun to his herte, to make him warm --
For wel hit feled the herte had harm --
To wite eek why hit was a-drad,
By kinde, and for to make hit glad;
For hit is membre principa
Of the body; and that made al
His hewe chaunge and wexe grene
And pale, for no blood was sene
In no maner lime of his.
Anoon therwith whan I saw this,
He ferde thus evel ther he sete,
I wente and stood right at his fete,
And grette him, but he spak nought,
But argued with his owne thought,
And in his witte disputed faste
Why and how his lyf might laste;
Him thoughte his sorwes were so smerte
And lay so colde upon his herte;
So, through his sorwe and hevy thoght,
Made him that he ne herde me noght;
For he had wel nigh lost his minde,
Thogh Pan, that men clepe god of kinde,
Were for his sorwes never so wrooth.
But at the laste, to sayn right sooth,
He was war of me, how I stood
Before him, and dide of myn hood,
And grette him, as I best coude.
Debonairly, and no-thing loude,
He sayde, 'I prey thee, be not wrooth,
I herde thee not, to sayn the sooth,
Ne I saw thee not, sir, trewely,'
'A! goode sir, no fors,' quod I,
'I am right sory if I have ought
Destroubled yow out of your thought;
For-yive me if I have mis-take.'
'Yis, thamendes is light to make,'
Quod he, 'for ther lyth noon ther-to;
Lo! how goodly spak this knight,
As it had been another wight;
He made it nouther tough ne queynte
And I saw that, and gan me aqueynte
With him, and fond him so tretable,
Right wonder skilful and resonable,
As me thoghte, for al his bale.
Anoon-right I gan finde a tale
To him, to loke wher I might ought
Have more knowing of his thought.
'Sir,' quod I, 'this game is doon;
I holde that this hert be goon;
Thise huntes conne him nowher see.'
'I do no fors therof,' quod he,
'My thought is ther-on never a del.'
'By our lord,' quod I, 'I trow yow wel,
Right so me thinketh by your chere.
But, sir, oo thing wol ye here?
Me thinketh, in gret sorwe I yow see;
But certes, good sir, yif that ye
Wolde ought discure me your wo,
I wolde, as wis god help me so,
Amede hit, yif I can or may;
Ye mowe preve hit by assay.
For, by my trouthe, to make yow hool,
I wol do al my power hool;
And telleth me of your sorwes smerte,
Paraventure hit may ese your herte,
That semeth ful seke under your syde.'
With that he loked on me asyde,
As who sayth, 'Nay, that wol not be.'
'Graunt mercy, goode frend,' quod he,
'I thanke thee that thou woldest so,
But hit may never the rather be do,
No man may my sorwe glade,
That maketh my hewe to falle and fade,
That me is wo that I was born!
May noght make my sorwes slyde,
Nought the remedies of Ovyde;
Ne Orpheus, god of melodye,
Ne Dedalus, with playes slye;
Ne hele me may phisicien,
Noght Ypocras, ne Galien;
Me is wo that I live houres twelve;
But who so wol assaye him-selve
Whether his herte can have pite
Of any sorwe, lat him see me.
I wrecche, that deeth hath mad al naked
Of alle blisse that ever was maked,
Y-worthe worste of alle wightes,
That hate my dayes and my nightes;
My lyf, my lustes be me lothe,
For al welfare and I be wrothe.
The pure deeth is so my fo
Thogh I wolde deye, hit wolde not so;
For whan I folwe hit, hit wol flee;
I wolde have hit, hit nil not me.
This is my peyne withoute reed,
Alway deinge and be not deed,
That Sesiphus, that lyth in helle,
May not of more sorwe telle.
And who so wiste al, be my trouthe,
My sorwe, but he hadde routhe
And pite of my sorwes smerte,
That man hath a feendly herte.
For who so seeth me first on morwe
May seyn, he hath y-met with sorwe;
‘Allas! and I wol telle the why;
My song is turned to pleyning,
And al my laughter to weping,
My glade thoghtes to hevinesse,
In travaile is myn ydelnesse
And eek my reste; my wele is wo,
My goode is harm, and ever-mo
In wrath is turned my pleying,
And my delyt in-to sorwing.
Myn hele is turned into seeknesse,
In drede is al my sikernesse.
To derke is turned al my light,
My wit is foly, my day is night,
My love is hate, my sleep waking,
My mirthe and meles is fasting,
My countenaunce is nycete,
And al abaved wher-so I be,
Mypees, in pleding and in werre;
‘Allas! how mighte I fare werre?
‘My boldnesse is turned to shame,
For fals Fortune hath pleyd a game
Atte ches with me, allas! the whyle!
The trayteresse fals and ful of gyle,
That al behoteth and no-thing halt,
She goth upryght and yet she halt,
The dispitouse deboaire,
That scorneth many a creature!
An ydole of fals portraiture
Is she, for she wil sone wryen;
She is the monstres heed y-wryen,
As filth over y-strawed with floures;
Hir moste worship and hir flour is
to lyen, for that is hir nature;
Withoute feth, lawe, or mesure.
She is fals; and ever laughinge
With oon eye, and that other wepinge.
That is broght up, she set al doun.
I lykne hir to the scorpion,
That is a fals, flateringe beste;
For with his hede he maketh feste,
But al amid his flateringe
With his tayle he wol stinge,
And envenyme; and so wol she.
She is shenious charite
That is ay fals, and seemeth wele,
So turneth she hir false whele
Aboute, for it is no-thing stable,
Now by the fyre, now at table;
Ful many oon hath she thus y-blent;
She is pley of enchantement,
That semeth oon and is not so,
The false thee! what hath she do,
Trowest thou? By our lord, I wol thee seye.
Atte ches with me she gan to pleye;
With hir false draughtes divers
She stal on me, and took my fers.
And whan I saw my fers aweye,
Alas! I couthe no lenger playe,
Farewel, swete, y-wis, and farwel al that ever ther is!
Therwith Fortune seyde, "Chek here!"
And "Mate!" in mid pointe of the chekkere
With a poune erraunt, allas!
Ful craftier to pley she was
Than Athalus, that made the game
First of the ches: so was his name.
But God wolde I had ones or twyes
Y-koud and knowe the leapardyes
That coude the Grec Pithagores!
I shulde have pleyd the bet at ches,
And kept my fers the bet therby;
And thoghe wherto? for trewely,
I hold that wish nat worth a stree!
Hit had be never the bet for me.
For Fortune can so many a wyle,
Ther be but fewe can hir begyle,
And eek she is the las to blame;
My-self I wolde have do the same,
Before god, hadde I been as she;
She oghte the more excused be.
For this I say yet more thereto,
Hadde I be god and mighte have do
My wille, whan she my fers caughte,
I wolde have drawe the same draughte.
For, also wis god yive me reste,
I dar wel swere she took the beste!

But through that draughte I have lorn
My blisse; alas! that I was born!

For evermore, I trowe trewly,
For al my wil, my lust hoolly
Is turned; but yet what to done?

Be oure lord, hit is to deye sone;
For no-thing I ne leve it noght,
But live and deye right in this thoght.

There nis planete in firmament,
Ne in air, ne in erthe, noon element,
That they ne yive me a yift echoon
Of weping, whan I am aloon.

For whan that I avyse me wel,
And bethenke me every-del,
How that ther lyth in rekening,
In my sorwe for no-thing;

And how ther leveth no gladnesse
May gladde me of my distresse,
And how I have lost suffisance,
Than may I say, I have right noght.

And whan al this falleth in my thoght,
Allas! than am I overcome!
For that is doon is not to come!
I have more sorowe than Tantale.'

And when I herde him telle this tale
Thus pitously, as I yow telle,
Unnethe mighte I lenger dwelle,
Hit dide myn hert so moche wo.

'A! good sir!' quod I, 'say not so!
Have som pite on your nature
That formed yow to creature,
Remembre yow of Socrates;

For he ne counted nat three strees
Of noght that Fortune coude do.'

'No,' quod he, 'I can not so.'
'Why so? good sir! parde!' quod I;
'Ne say noght so, for trewely,
Thogh ye had lost the ferses twelve,
And ye for sorwe mordred your-selve,
Ye sholde be dampned in this cas
By as good right as Medea was,
That slow hir children for Jason;
And Phyllis als for Demophon
Heng hir-self, so weylaway!
For he had broke his terme-day
To come to hir. Another rage
Had Dydo, quene eek of Cartage,
That slow hir-self for Eneas
Was fals; a whiche a fool she was!
And Ecquo dyed for Narcisus.
Nolde nat love hir; and right thus
Hath many another folly don.

And for Dalida died Sampson,
That slow him-self with a pilere.
But ther is noon a-lyve here
Wolde for a fers make this wo!'
I have lost more than thou weneest.'

'Lo, sir, how may that be?' quod I;

'Good sir, tel me al hoolly

In what wyse, how, why, and wherfore

That ye have thus your blisse lore,'

'Blythly,' quod he, 'com sit adoun,

I telle thee up condicioun

That thou hoolly, with al thy wit,

Do thynt entent to herkene hit.'

'Yis, sir.' 'Swere thy trouthe ther-to.'

'Gladly.' 'Do than holde her-to!'

'I shal right blythly, so god me save,

Hoolly, with al the witte I have,

Here yow, as wel as I can,'

'A goddes half!' quod he, and began: --

'Sir,' quod he, 'sith first I couthe

To compreheunde, in any thing,

What love was, in myn owne wit,

Dredeles, I have ever yit

Be tributary, and yiven rente

To love hoolly with goode entente,

And through plesaunce become his thral,

With good wil, body, herte, and al.

Al this I putte in his servage,

As to my lorde, and dide homage;

And ful devoutly prayde him to,

That it plesaunce to him were,

And worship to my lady dere.

And this was longe, and many a yeer

Or that myn herte was set o-wher,

That I did thus, and niste why;

I trowe hit cam me kindely.

Paraunter I was therto most able

As a whyt wal or a table;

For hit is redy to cacche and take

Al that men wil therin make,

Wher-so so men wol portreye or peynte,

Be the werkes never so queynte.

`And thilke tyme I ferde so

I was able to have lerned tho,

And to have coud as wel or better,

Paraunter, other art or letter.

But for love cam first in my thought,

Therfore I forgat hit nought.

I chees love to my firste craft,

Forwhy I took hit of so yong age,

That malice hadde my corage

Nat that tyme turned to no-thing

Through to mochel knowleching.

For that tyme youthe, my maistresse,

Governed me in ydelnesse;

For hit was in my firste youthe,

And tho ful litel good I couthe,

For al my werkes were fittinge,

And al my thoughtes varyinge;

Al were to me y-liche good,
That I knew tho; but thus hit stood.

`Hit happed that I cam on a day
Into a place, ther I say,
Trewly, the fayrest companye
Of ladies that ever man with ye
Had seen togedres in oo place.
Shal I clepe hit hap other grace
That brought me ther? nay, but Fortune,
That is to lyen ful comune,
The false trayteresse, pervers,
God wolde I coude clepe hir wers!
For now she worcheth me ful wo,
And I wol telle sone why so.
`Among thise ladies thus echoon,
Soth to seyn, I saw ther oon
That was lyk noon of al the route;
For I dar swere, withoute doute,
That as the someres sonne bright
Is fairer, clere, and hath more light
Than any planete, is in heven,
The mone, or the sterres seven,
For al the worlde so had she
Surmounted hem alle of beaute,
Of maner and of comlinesse,
Of stature and wel set gladnesse,
Of goodlihede so wel beseye --
Shortly, what shal I more seye?
By god, and by his halwes twelve,
It was my swete, right al hir-selve!
She had so stedfast countenaunce,
So noble port and meyntenaunce.
And Love, that had herd my bone,
Had espyed me thus sone,
That she ful sone, in my thoght,
As helpe me god, so was y-caught
So sodenly, that I ne took
No maner reed but at hir look
And at myn herte; for-why hir eyen
So gladly, I trow, myn herte seyen,
That purely tho myn owne thoght
Seyde hit were bet serve hir for noght
Than with another to be wel.
And hit was sooth, for, everydel,
I wil anoon-right telle thee why.
I saw hir daunce so comlily,
Carole and singe so swetely,
Laughe and pleye so womanly,
And loke so debonairly,
So goodly speke and so frendly,
That certes, I trow, that evermore
Nas seyn so blisful a tresore.
For every heer upon hir hede,
Soth to seyn, hit was not rede,
Ne nouther yelw, ne broun hit nas;
Me thoghte, most lyk gold hit was.
And whiche eyen my lady hadde!
Debonair, goode, glade, and sadde,
Simple, of good mochel, noght to wyde;
Therto hir look nas not a-syde,
Ne overthwert, but beset so wel,
Hit drew and took up, everydel,
Alle that on hir gan beholde.
Hir eyen semed anoon she wolde
Have mercy; fooles wenden so;
But hit was never the rather do.
Hit nas no countrefeted thing,
It was hir owne pure looking,
That the goddesse, dame Nature,
Had made hem opene by mesure,
And close; for, were she never so glad,
Hir loking was not foly sprad,
Ne wildely, thogh that she pleyde;
But ever, me thoght, hir eyen seyde,
"By god, my wrathe is al for-yive!"
"Therwith hir liste so wel to live,
That dulnesse was of hir a-drad.
She nas to sobre ne to glad;
In alle things more mesure
Had never, I trowe, creature.
But many oon with hir loke she herte,
And that sat hir ful lyte at herte,
For she knew no-thing of her thoght;
But whether she knew, or knew hit noght,
Algate she ne roghte of hem a stree!
To gete hir love no ner was he
That woned at home, than he in Inde;
The formest was alway behinde.
But goode folk, over al other,
She loved as man may do his brother;
Of whiche love she was wonder large,
In skilful places that bere charge.
Which a visage had she ther-to!
Allas! myn herte is wonder wo
That I ne can discryven hit!
Me lakketh bothe English and wit
For to undo hit at the fulle;
And eek my spirits be so dulle
So greet a thing for to devyse.
I have no wit that can suffyse
To comprehenden hir beaute;
But thus moche dar I seyn, that she
Was rody, fresh, and lyvely hewed;
And every day hir beaute newed.
And neigh hir face was alder-best;
For certes, Nature had swich lest
To make that fair, that trewly she
Was hir cheef patron of beautee,
And cheef ensample of al hir werke,
And moustre; for, be hit never so derke,
Me thinketh I see hir ever-mo.
And yet more-over, thogh alle tho
That ever lived were not a-lyve,
They ne sholde have founde to discryve
In al hir face a wikked signe;
For hit was sad, simple, and benigne.
`And which a goodly, softe speche
Had that swete, my lyves leche!
So frendly, and so wel y-grounded,
Up al resoun so wel y-founded,
And so tretable to alle gode,
That I dar swere by the rode,
Of eloquence was never founde
So swete a sowninge facounde,
Ne trewer tonged, ne scorned lasse,
Ne bet coude hele; that, by the masse,
That ther was never yet through hir tonge
Man ne woman gretly harmed;
As for hir, ther was al harm hid;
Ne lasse flatering in hir worde,
That purely, hir simple recorde
Was founde as trewe as any bonde,
Or trouthe of any mauns honde.
Ne chyde she coude never a del
That knoweth al the world ful wel.
'But swich a fairnesse of a nekke
Had that swete that boon nor brekke
Nas ther non sene, that mis-sat.
Hit was whyt, smothe, streight, and flat,
Withouten hole; and canel-boon,
As by seming, had she noon.
Hir throate, as I have now memoire,
Se med a round tour of yvoire,
Of good gretnesse, and noght to grete.
'And gode faire Whyte she hete,
That was my lady name right.
She was bothe fair and bright,
She hadde not hir name wrong.
Right faire shulldres, and body long
She hadde, and armes; every lith
Fattish, flesshy, not grete therwith;
Right whyte handes, and nayles rede,
Rounde brestes; and of good brede
Hyr hippoc were, a streight flat bake.
I knew on hir non other lak
That al hir limmes nere sewing,
In as fer as I had knowing.
'Therto she coude so wel pleye,
Whan that hir liste, that I dar seye,
That she was lyk to torche bright,
That every man may take of light
YNogh, and hit hath never the lesse.
'Of maner and of comlinesse
Right so ferde my lady dere;
For every wight of hir manere
Might caache ynogh, if that he wolde,
If he had eyen hir to beholde.
For I dar sweren, if that she
HAD among ten thousand be,
She wolde have be, at the leste,
A cheef mirour of al the feste,
Thogh they had stonden in a rowe,
To mennes eyen coude have knowe.
For wher-so men had pleyd or waked,
Me thoghte the felawship as naked
Withouten hir, that saw I ones,
As a coroune withoute stones.
Trewly she was, to myn ye,
The soleyn fenix of Arabye,
For ther liveth never but oon;
Ne swich as she ne know I noon.
To speke of goodnesse; trewly she
Had as moche debonairte
As ever had Hester in the bible
And more, if more were possible.
And, soth to seyne, therewith-al
She had a wit so general,
So hool enclyned to alle gode,
That al hir wit was set, by the rode,
Withoute malice, upon gladnesse;
Therto I saw never yet a lesse
Harmul, than she was in doing.
I sey nat that she ne had knowing
What harm was; or elles she
Had coud no good, so thinketh me.
`And trewly, for to speke of trouthe,
But she had had, hit had be routhe.
Therof she had so moche hir del --
And I dar seyn and swere hit wel --
That Trouthe him-self, over al and al,
Had chose his maner principal
In hir, that was his resting-place.
Ther-to she hadde the moste grace,
To have stedfast perseveraunce,
And esy, atempre governaunce,
That ever I knew or wiste yit;
So pure suffraunt was hir wit.
And reson gladly she understood,
Hit folowed wel she coude good.
She used gladly to do wel;
These were hir maners every-del.
`Therwith she loved so wel right,
She wrong do wolde to no wight;
No wight might do hir no shame,
She loved so wel hir owne name.
Hir luste to holde no wight in honde;
Ne, be thou siker, she nolde fonde
To holde no wight in balaunce,
By half word ne by countenaunce,
But-if men wolde upon hir lye;
Ne sende men in-to Walakye,
To Pruyse, and in-to Tartarye,
To Alisaundre, ne in-to Turkye,
And bidde him faste, anoon that he
Go hoodles to the drye see,
And come hoom by the Carrenare;
And seye, "Sir, be now right ware
That I may of yow here seyn
Worship, or that ye come ageyn!"
She ne used no suche knakkes smale.
`But wherfor that I telle my tale?
Right on this same, as I have seyd,
Was hoolly al my love leyd;
For certes, she was, that swete wyf,
My suffisaunce, my lust, my lyf,
Myn hap, myn hele, and al my blisse,
My worldes welfare, and my lisse,
And I hires hoolly, everydel.'
`By our lord,' quod I, ´I trowe yow wel!
Hardely, your love was wel beset,
I not how ye mighte have do bet.'

Bet? ne no wight so wel!' quod he.

'I trowe hit, sir,' quod I, 'parde!'

'Nay, leve hit wel!' 'Sir, so do I;

I leve yow wel, that trewely

Yow thoughte, that she was the beste,

And to beholde the alderfaireste,

Who so had loked hir with your eyen.'

`With myn? Nay, alle that hir seyen

Seyde and sworn hit was so.

And thogh they ne hadde, I wolde tho

Have loved best my lady fre,

Thogh I had had al the beautee

That ever had Alcipyades,

And al the strengthe of Ercules,

And therto had the worthinesse

Of Alisaundre, and al the richesse

That ever was in Babiloyne,

In Cartage, or in Macedoyne,

Or in Rome, or in Ninive;

And therto al-so hardy be

As was Ector, so have I loye,

That Achilles slow at Troye --

And therfor was he slayn also

In a temple, for bothe two

Were slayn, he and Antilegius,

And so seyth Dares Frigius,

For love of hir Polixena --

Or ben as wys as Minerva,

I wolde ever, withoute drede,

"Nede!" nay, I gabbe now,

Noght "nede", and I wol telle how,

For of good wille myn herte hit wolde

And eek to love hir I was holde

As for the fairest and the beste.

`She was as good, so have I reste,

As ever was Penelope of Grece,

Or as the noble wyf Lucrece,

She was as good, and no-thing lyke,

Thogh hir stories be autentyke;

Algate she was as trewe as she.

`But wherfor that I telle thee

Whan I first my lady say?

I was right yong, the sooth to sey,

And ful gret need I hadde to lerne;

Whan my herte wolde yerne

to love, it was a greet empryse.

But as my wit coude best suffyse,

After my yonge childly wit,

Withoute drede, I besette hit

To love hir in my beste wise,

To do hir worship and servyse

That I tho coude, be my trouthe,

Withoute feyning outhyr slouthe;

For wonder fayn I wolde hir see.

So mochel hit amended me,

That, whan I saw hir first a-morwe,
I was warished of al my sorwe
Of al day after, til hit were eve;
Me thoghte no-thing mighte me greve,
Were my sorwes never so smerte.
And yit she sit so in myn herte,
Leve my lady; no, trewly!
‘Now, by my trouthe, sir,’ quod I,
As shrift withoute repentaunce.’
‘Repentaunce! nay, fy,’ quod he;
‘Shulde I now repente me
To love? nay, certes, than were I wel
Wers than was Achitofel,
Or Anthenor, so have I Ioye,
The traytour that betraysed Troye,
Or the false Genelon,
He that purchased the treson
Of Rowland and of Olivere.
Nay, why! I am a-lyve here
Nil foryete hir never-mo.
‘Now, goode sir,’ quod I right tho,
Ye han wel told me her-before.
It is no need rehearse hit more
How ye sawe hir first, and where;
But wolde ye telle me the manere,
To hir which was your firste speche --
Therof I wolde yow be-seche --
And how she knewe first your thoght,
Whether ye loved hir or noght,
And telleth me eek what ye have lore;
I herde yow telle hir her-before.
‘Ye,’ seyde he, ‘thow nost what thou menest;
I have lost more than thou wenest.’
‘What los is that, sir?’ quod I tho;
‘Nil she not love yow? Is hit so?
Or have ye oght y-doon amis,
That she hath left yow? is hit this?
For goddes love, telle me al.’
‘Before god,’ quod he, ‘and I shal.
I saye right as I have seyd,
On hir was al my love leyd;
And yet she niste hit never a del
Noght longe tyme, leve hit wel.
For be right siker, I durste noght
For al this worlde telle hir my thoght,
Ne I wolde have wratthed hir, trewely.
And wostow why? she was lady
Of the body; she had the herte,
And who hath that, may not asterte.
‘But, for to kepe me fro ydelnesse,
Trewly I did my besinesse
To make songes, as I best coude,
And ofte tymes I song hem loude;
And made songes a gret del,
Al-thogh I coude not make so wel
Songes, ne knowe the art al,
As coude Lamekes sone Tubal,
That fond out first the art of songe;
For, as his brothers hamers ronge
Upon his anvelt up and doun,
Therof he took the firste soun;
But Grekes seyn, Pictagoras,
That he the firste finder was
Of the art; Aurora telleth so,
But therof no fors, of hem two.
Algates songes thus I made
Of my feling, myn herte to glade;
And lo! this was the alther-firste,
I not wher that hit were the werst. --
"Lord, hit maketh myn herte light,
Whan I thenke on that swete wight
That is so semely on to see;
And wishe to god hit might so be,
That she wolde holde me for hir knight,
My lady, that is so fair and bright!" --
Now have I told thee, sooth to saye,
My firste song. Upon a daye
I bethoghte me what wo
And sorwe that I suffred tho
For hir, and yet she wiste hit noght,
Ne telle hir durste I nat my thoght.
'Allas!' thoghte I, 'I can no reed;
And, but I telle hir, I nam but deed;
And if I telle hir, to seye soothe,
I am a-dred she wol be wrooth;
Allas! what shal I thanne do?'
'In this debat I was so wo,
Me thoghte myn herte braste a-tweyn!
So atte laste, soth to sayn,
I me bethoghte that nature
Ne formed never in creature
So moche beaute, trewely,
And bounte, withouten mercy.
'In hope of that, my tale I tolde,
With sorwe, as that I never sholde;
For nedes, and, maugree my heed,
I mooste have told hir or be deed.
I not wel how that I began,
Ful evel rehersen hit I can;
And eek, as helpe me god with-al,
I trowe hit was in the dismal,
That was the ten woundes of Egipte;
For many a word I over-skipte
In my tale, for pure fere
Lest my wordes mis-set were.
With sorwe ful herte, and woundes dede,
Softe and quaking for pure drede
And shame, and stinting in my tale
For ferde, and myn hewe al pale,
Ful ofte I wex bothe pale and reed;
Bowing to hir, I heng the heed;
I durste nat ones loke hir on,
For wit, manere, and al was gon.
I seyde "mercy!" and no more;
Hit nas no game, hit sat me sore.
'So atte laste, soothe to seyn,
Whan that myn herte was come ageyn,
To telle shortly al my speche,
With hool herte I gan hir beseche
That she wolde be my lady swete;
And swor, and gan hir hertely hete
Ever to be stedfast and trewe,
And love hir alwey freshly newe,
And never other lady have,
And al hir worship for to save
As I best coude; I swor hir this --
"For youres is al that ever ther is
For evermore, myn herte swete!
And never false yow, but I mete,
I nil, as wis god helpe me so!"

`And whan I had my tale y-do,
God wot, she acounted nat a stree
Of al my tale, so thoghte me.
To telle shortly as hit is,
Trewly hir answere, hit was this;
I can not now wel counterfete
Hir wordes, but this was the grete
Of hir answere: she sayde, "nay"
Al-outerly. Allas! that day
The sorwe I suffred, and the wo!
That trewly Cassandra, that so
Bewayled the destruccioun.
Of Troye and of Ilioun,
Had never swich sorwe as I tho.
I durste no more say therto
For pure fere, but stal away;
And thus I lived ful many a day;
Never a day to seche sorwe;
I fond hit redy every morwe,
For-why I loved hir in no gere.
`So hit befel, another yere,
I thoughte ones I wolde fonde
To do hir knowe and understonde
My wo; and she wel understood
That I ne wilned thing but good,
And worship, and to kepe hir name
Over al thing, and drede hir shame,
And was so besy hir to serve; --
And pite were I shulde sterve,
Sith that I wilned noon harm, y-wis.
So whan my lady knew al this,
My lady yaf me al hoolly
The noble yift of hir mercy,
Saving hir worship, by al weyes;
Dredles, I mene noon other weyes.
And therwith she yaf me a ring;
I trowe hit was the firste thing;
But if myn herte was y-waxe
Glad, that is no need to axe!
As helpe me god, I was as blyve,
Reysed, as fro dethe to lyve,
Of alle happes the alder-beste,
The gladdest and the moste at reste.
For trewely, that swete wight,
When I had wrong and she the right,
She wolde alwey so goodeyly
For-yeve me so debonairly.
In alle my youthe, in alle chaunce,
She took me in hir governaunce.
`Therwith she was alway so trewe,
Our loye was ever y-liche newe;
Our hertes wern so even a payre,
That never nas that oon contrayre
To that other, for no wo.
For sothe, y-liche they suffred tho
Oo blisse and eek oo sorwe bothe;
Y-liche they were bothe gladde and wrothe;
Al was us oon, withoute were.
And thus we lived ful many a yere
So wel, I can nat telle how.'
Sir,' quod I, `where is she now?'
`Now!' quod he, and stinte anoon.
Therwith he wex as deed as stoon,
And seyde, `allas! that I was bore,
That was the los, that her-before
I told thee, that I had lorn.
Bethenk how I seyde her-beforn,
"Thou wost ful litel what thou menest;
I have lost more than thou wenest" --
God wot, allas! right that was she!
`Allas! sir, how? what may that be?'
`She is deed!' `Nay!' `Yis, by my trouthe!'
`Is that your los? By god, hit is routhe!'
And with that worde, right anoon,
They gan to strake forth; al was doon,
For that tyme, the hert-hunting.
With that, me thoghte, that this king
Gan quikly hoomward for to ryde
Unto a place ther besyde,
Which was from us but a lyte,
A long castel with walles whyte,
Be seynt Iohan! on a riche hil,
As me mette; but thus it fil.
Right thus me mette, as I yow telle,
That in the castel was a belle,
As hit had smiten houres twelve. --
Therwith I awook my-selve,
And fond me lying in my bed;
And the book that I had red,
Of Alcyone and Seys the king,
And of the goddes of sleping,
I fond it in myn honde ful even.
Thoghte I, `this is so queynt a sweven,
That I wol, be processe of tyme,
Fonde to putte this sweven in ryme
As I can best'; and that anoon. --
This was my sweven; now hit is doon.
Explicit the Boke of the Duchesse.

End of "The Book of the Duchess"
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