

JOHN DRYDEN

THE WORKS OF JOHN
DRYDEN, NOW FIRST
COLLECTED IN
EIGHTEEN VOLUMES.
VOLUME 12

John Dryden
The Works of John Dryden,
now first collected in
eighteen volumes. Volume 12

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*The Works of John Dryden, Now First Collected in Eighteen Volumes; Vol. 12
(of 18):*

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APPENDIX TO THE FABLES

This Appendix contains the Original Tales of Chaucer, which Dryden has modernized. The Novels of Boccacio are subjoined to the several Poetical English Versions.

THE KNIGHTES TALE,

BY GEOFFREY CHAUCER

Whilom, as old stories tellen us,
There was a duk that highte Theseus;
Of Athenes he was lord and governour,
And in his time swiche a conquerour,
That greter was ther non under the sonne;
Ful many a riche contree had he wonne.
What with his wisdom and his chevalrie,
He conquerd all the regne of Feminie,
That whilom was ycleped Scythia,
And wedded the fresshe Quene Ipolita,
And brought hire home with him to his contree
With mochel glorie and solempnitee,
And eke hire yonge suster Emelie.
And thus with victorie and with melodie
Let I this worthy duk to Athenes ride,
And all his host in armes him beside.
And certes, if it n'ere to long to here,
I wolde have told you fully the manere
How wonnen was the regne of Feminie
By Theseus, and by his chevalrie:
And of the grete bataille for the nones

Betwix Athenes and Amasones:
And how asseged was Ipolita,
The faire hardie quene of Scythia;
And of the feste, that was at hire wedding,
And of the temple at hire home coming:
But all this thing I moste as now forbere;
I have, God wot, a large feld to ere,
And weke ben the oxen in my plowe:
The remenent of my tale is long ynow.
I wil not letten eke non of this route;
Let every felaw telle his tale aboute,
And let se now who shal the souper winne,
There as I left, I will agen beginne.
This duk, of whom I made mentioun,
Whan he was comen almost to the toun,
In all his wele and his moste pride,
He was ware, as he cast his eye aside,
Wher that ther kneled in the highe wey
A compaignie of ladies, twey and twey,
Eche after other, clad in clothes blake;
But swiche a crie and swiche a wo they make,
That in this world n'is creature living
That ever heard swiche another waimenting;
And of this crie ne wolde never stenten,
Till they the reines of his bridel henten.
What folk be ye that at min home coming
Perturben so my feste with crying?
Quod Theseus; have ye so grete envie
Of min honour, that thus complaine and crie?

Or who hath you misboden, or offended?
Do telle me, if that it may be amended,
And why ye be thus clothed all in blake?
The oldest lady of hem all than spake,
Whan she had swouned with a dedly chere,
That it was reuthe for to seen and here.
She sayde, Lord, to whom Fortune hath yeven
Victorie, and as a conqueror to liven,
Nought greveth us your glorie and your honour,
But we beseke you of mercie and socour:
Have mercie on our wo and our distresse:
Some drope of pitee through thy gentillesse
Upon us wretched wimmen let now fall;
For certes, lord, there n'is non of us alle
That she n'hath ben a duchesse or a quene;
Now be we caitives, as it is wel sene:
Thanked be Fortune, and hire false whele,
That non estat ensureth to be wele.
And certes, lord, to abiden your presence,
Here in this temple of the goddessse Clemence,
We han ben waiting all this fourteenight:
Now help us, lord, sin it lieth in thy might.
I wretched wight, that wepe and waile thus,
Was whilom wif to King Capaneus,
That starfe at Thebes, cursed be that day,
And alle we that ben in this aray,
And maken all this lamentation,
We losten all our husbandes at that toun,
While that the siege therabouten lay:

And yet now the old Creon, wala wa!
That lord is now of Thebes the citee,
Fulfilled of ire and of inquittee,
He for despit, and for his tyrannie,
To don the ded bodies a vilanie,
Of alle our lordes, which that ben yslawe,
Hath alle the bodies on an hepe ydrawe,
And will not suffren hem by non assent
Neither to ben yberied, ne ybrent,
But maketh houndes ete hem in despite.
And with that word, withouten more respite,
They fallen groff, and crien pitously,
Have on us wretched wimmen som mercy,
And let our sorwe sinken in thin herte.
This gentil duk down from his courser sterte,
With herte piteous, whan he herd hem speke.
Him thoughte that his herte wold all to-breke
When he saw hem so pitous and so mate
That whilom weren of so gret estate,
And in his armes, he hem all up hente,
And hem comforted in ful good entente,
And swore his oth, as he was trewe knight,
He wolde don so ferforthly his might
Upon the tyrant Creon hem to wreke,
That all the peple of Grece shulde speke
How Creon was of Theseus yserved;
As he that hath his deth ful wel deserved.
And right anon, withouten more abode,
His banner he displaide, and forth he rode

To Thebes ward, and all his host beside:
No ner Athenes n'olde he go ne ride,
Ne take his ese fully half a day,
But onward on his way that night he lay,
And sent anon Ipolita the quene
And Emeli hire yonge sister shene,
Unto the toun of Athenes for to dwell;
And forth he rit; ther n'is no more to tell.
The red statue of Mars, with spere and targe,
So shineth in his white banner large,
That all the feldes gliteren up and doun;
And by his banner borne is his penoun,
Of golde ful riche, in which ther was ybete
The Minotaure, which that he slew in Crete.
Thus rit this duk, thus rit this conquerour,
And in his host of chevalrie the flour,
Til that he came to Thebes, and alight
Fayre in a felde, ther as he thought to fight:
But shortly for to speken of this thing,
With Creon, which that was of Thebes king,
He fought and slew him manly as a knight
In plaine bataille, and put his folk to flight;
And by assaut he wan the citee after,
And rent adoun bothe wall, and sparre, and rafter;
And to the ladies he restored again
The bodies of hir housbondes that were slain,
To don the obsequies, as was tho the gise.
But it were all to long for to devise
The grete clamour and the waimenting

Whiche that the ladies made at the brenning
Of the bodies, and the gret honour
That Theseus, the noble conquerour,
Doth to the ladies whan they from him wente;
But shortly for to telle is min entente.
Whan that this worthy duk, this Theseus,
Hath Creon slain, and wonnen Thebes thus,
Still in the feld he toke all night his reste,
And did with all the countree as hem leste;
To ransake in the tas of bodies dede,
Hem for to stripe of harneis and of wede,
The pillours dide hir businesse and cure,
After the bataille and discomfiture;
And so befell, that, in the tas, they found,
Thurgh girt with many a grevous bloody wound,
Two yonge knightes ligging by and by,
Bothe in on armes, wrought ful richely;
Of whiche two, Arcite highte that on.
And he that other highte Palamon.
Not fully quik, ne fully ded they were,
But by hir cote armure, and by hir gere,
The heraudes knew hem wel in special,
As tho that weren of the blod real
Of Thebes, and of sustren two yborne:
Out of the tas the pillours han hem torne,
And han hem carried soft unto the tente
Of Theseus, and he ful sone hem sente
To Athenes, for to dwellen in prison
Perpetuel, he n'olde no raunson.

And whan this worthy duk had thus ydon,
He toke his host, and home he rit anon,
With laurel crouned as a conquerour;
And ther he liveth in joye and in honour,
Terme of his lif; what nedeth wordes mo?
And in a tour, in anguish and in wo,
Dwellen this Palamon, and eke Arcite,
For evermo, ther may no gold hem quite.
Thus passeth yere by yere, and day by day,
Till it fell ones, in a morwe of May,
That Emilie, that fayrer was to sene
Than is the lilie upon the stalke grene,
And fressher than the May with floures new,
(For with the rose colour strof hire hewe,
I n'ot which was the finer of hem two,)
Er it was day, as she was wont to do,
She was arisen, and all redy dight;
For May wol have no slogardie a-night:
The season priketh every gentil herte,
And maketh him out of his slepe to sterte,
And sayth, Arise, and do thin observance.
This maketh Emelie han remembrance
To don honour to May, and for to rise;
Yclothed was she fresshe for to devise;
Hire yelwe here was broided in a tresse
Behind hire back, a yerde long I gesse;
And in the gardin at sonne uprist,
She walketh up and doun wher as hire list;
She gathereth floures, partie white and red,

To make a sotel garland for hire hed;
And as an angel hevenlich she song:
The grete tour that was so thikke and strong,
Which, of the castel, was the chef dongeon
(Wher as these knightes weren in prison,
Of which I tolde you, and tellen shal,)
Was even joinant to the gardin wall,
Ther as this Emelie had hire playing.
Bright was the sonne, and clere that morwening,
And Palamon, this woful prisoner,
As was his wone, by leve of his gayler,
Was risen, and romed in a chambre on high,
In which he all the noble citee seigh,
And eke the gardin ful of brandies grene,
Ther as this fresshe Emelie the shene
Was in hire walk, and romed up and down.
This sorweful prisoner, this Palamon,
Goth in his chambre roming to and fro,
And to himselfe complaining of his wo:
That he was borne, ful oft he sayd, Alas!
And so befel, by aventure, or cas,
That thurgh a window thikke of many a barre
Of yren gret, and square as any sparre,
He cast his eyen upon Emilia,
And therwithal he blent, and cried, A!
As though he stongen were unto the herte.
And with that crie Arcite anon up sterte,
And saide, Cosin min, what eyleth thee,
That art so pale and dedly for to see?

Why cridest thou? who hath thee don offence?
For Goddes love, take all in patience
Our prison, for it may non other be,
Fortune hath yeven us this adversite:
Som wikke aspect or disposition
Of Saturne, by som constellation,
Hath yeven us this, although we had it sworn:
So stood the heven, when that we were born;
We moste endure; this is the short and plain.
This Palamon answerde, and sayde again,
Cosin, forsoth of this opinion
Thou hast a vaine imagination;
This prison caused me not to crie,
But I was hurt right now thurghout min eye
Into min herte, that wol my bane be.
The fayrenesse of a lady that I se
Yond in the gardin, roming to and fro,
Is cause of all my crying and wo:
I n'ot whe'r she be woman or goddesse,
But Venus is it, sothly, as I gesse.
And therwithall on knees adoun he fill,
And sayde, Venus, if it be your will
You in this gardin thus to transfigure,
Beforn me sorweful wretched creature,
Out of this prison helpe that we may scape,
And if so be our destine be shape
By eterne word, to dien in prison,
Of our lignage have som compassion,
That is so low ybrought by tyrannie.

And with that word Arcita gan espie
Wher as this lady romed to and fro,
And with that sight hire beaute hurt him so,
That if that Palamon was wounded sore,
Arcite is hurt as moche as he, or more:
And with a sigh he sayde pitously,
The fresshe bentee sleth me sodenly,
Of hire that rometh in yonder place.
And but I have hire mercie and hire grace,
That I may seen hire at the leste way,
I n'am but ded, there n'is no more to say.
This Palamon, whan he these wordes herd,
Dispitously he loked, and answerd,
Whether sayest thou this in earnest or in play?
Nay, quod Arcite, in earnest be my fay;
God helpe me so, me lust full yvel play.
This Palamon gan knit his browes twey:
It were, quod he, to thee no gret honour
For to be false, ne for to be traytour
To me, that am thy cosin and thy brother:
Ysworne ful depe, and eche of us to other,
That neuer for to dien in the peine,
Till that the deth departen shal us tweine,
Neither of us in love to hindre other,
Ne in non other cas, my leve brother;
But that thou shuldest trewely forther me
In evry cas, as I shuld forther thee.
This was thin oth, and min also certain,
I wot it wel thou darst it not withsain:

Thus art thou of my conseil out of doute,
And now thou woldest falsly ben aboute
To love my lady, whom I love and serve,
And ever shal, til that min herte sterve.
Now certes, false Arcite, thou shalt not so;
I loved hire firste, and tolde thee my wo,
As to my conseil, and to my brother sworne
To forther me, as I have tolde beforne,
For which thou art ybounden as a knight
To helpen me, if it lie in thy might;
Or elles art thou false, I dare wel sain.
This Arcita full proudly spake again:
Thou shalt, quod he, be rather false than I,
And thou art false, I tell thee utterly.
For *par amour* I loved hire first, or thou.
What wolt thou sayn, thou wistest nat right now
Whether she were a woman or a goddesse:
Thin is affection of holinesse,
And min is love as to a creature,
For which I tolde thee min aventure,
As to my cosin, and my brother sworne.
I pose, that thou lovedst hire beforne:
Wost thou not wel the olde clerkes sawe,
That who shall give a lover any lawe?
Love is a greter lawe, by my pan,
Than may be yeven of any erthly man;
And therefore positif lawe, and swiche decree
Is broken all day for love in eche degree.
A man moste nedes love, maugre his hed;

He may nat fleen it though he shuld be ded,
All be she maid, or widewe, or elles wif.
And eke it is not likely all thy lif
To stonden in hire grace, no more shal I;
For well thou wost thyselven veraily,
That thou and I be damned to prison
Perpetuel, us gaineth no raunson.
We strive, as did the houndes for the bone,
They fought all day, and yet hir part was none:
Ther came a kyte, while that they were so wrothe,
And bare away the bone betwix hem bothe:
And, therefore, at kinges court, my brother,
Eche man for himself, ther is non other.
Love if thee lust, for I love, and ay shal;
And sothly, leve brother, this is al.
Here in this prison mosten we endure,
And everich of us take his aventure.
Great was the strif, and long, betwix hem twey,
If that I hadde leiser for to sey;
But to the effect. It happed on a day,
(To tell it you as shortly as I may,)
A worthy duk that highte Perithous,
That felaw was to this duk Theseus
Sin thilke day that they were children lite,
Was come to Athenes, his felaw to visite,
And for to play, as he was wont to do,
For in this world he loved no man so;
And he loved him as tenderly again:
So well they loved, as old bokes sain,

That whan that on was ded, sothly to tell,
His felaw wente and sought him down in hell;
But of that storie list me not to write.
Duk Perithous loved wel Arcite,
And had him knowe at Thebes yere by yere,
And finally, at request and praier
Of Perithous, withouten any raunson,
Duk Theseus let him out of prison,
Frely to gon wher that him list over all,
In swiche a gise as I you tellen shall.
This was the forword, plainly for to endite,
Betwixen Theseus and him Arcite:
That if so were, that Arcite were yfound
Ever in his lif, by day or night, o stound
In any countree of this Theseus,
And he were caught, it was accorded thus,
That with a swerd he shulde lese his hed;
Ther was non other remedie, ne rede.
But taketh his leve, and homeward he him speede:
Let him beware, his nekke lieth to wedde.
How great a sorwe suffereth now Arcite?
The deth he feleth thurgh his herte smite:
He wepeth, waileth, crieth pitously,
To sleen himself he waiteth prively.
He said, Alas the day that I was borne!
Now is my prison werse than beforne;
Now is me shape eternally to dwelle
Not only in purgatorie, but in helle.
Alas! that ever I knew Perithous,

For elles had I dwelt with Theseus,
Yfetered in his prison evermo,
Than had I ben in blisse, and not in wo:
Only the sight of hire, whom that I serve,
Though that I never hire grace may deserve,
Wold have sufficed right ynough for me.
O dere cosin Palamon, quod he,
Thin is the victorie of this aventure;
Ful blisful in prison maiest thou endure:
In prison! certes nay, but in paradise.
Wel hath Fortune yturned thee the dise,
That hast the sight of hire, and I the absence.
For possible is, sin thou hast hire presence,
And art a knight, a worthy and an able,
That by some cas, sin Fortune is changeable,
Thou maiest to thy desir sometime atteine:
But I that am exiled, and barreine
Of alle grace, and in so gret despaire,
That ther n'is erthe, water, fire, ne aire,
Ne creature, that of hem maked is,
That may me hele or don comfort in this,
Wel ought I sterve in wanhope and distresse.
Farewel my lif, my lust, and my gladnesse.
Alas! why plainen men so in commune
Of purveiance of God, or of Fortune,
That yeveth hem ful oft in many a gise,
Wel better than they can hemself devise;
Som man desireth for to have richesse,
That cause is of his murdre or gret siknesse;

And som man wold out of his prison fayne,
That in his house is of his meinie slain.
Infinite harmes ben in this matere,
We wote not what thing that we praien here.
We saren as he that dronke is as a mous:
A dronken man wot wel he hath an hous,
But he ne wot which the right way thider,
And to a dronken man the way is slider.
And certes in this world so faren we;
We seken fast after felicite,
But we go wrong ful often trewely.
Thus we may sayen alle, and namely I,
That wende, and had a gret opinion,
That if I might escapen fro prison,
Than I had ben in joye and parfite hele,
Ther now I am exiled fro my wele.
Sin that I may not seen you, Emelie,
I n'am but ded; there n'is no remedie.
Upon that other side Palamon,
Whan that he wist Arcita was agon,
Swiche sorwe he maketh, that the grete tour
Resounded of his yelling and clamour.
The pure fetters on his shinnes grete
Were of his bitter salte teres wete.
Alas! quod he, Arcita, cosin min,
Of all our strif, God wot, the frute is thin.
Thou walkest now in Thebes at thy large,
And of my wo, thou yevest litel charge.
Thou maist, sith thou hast wisdom and manhede,

Assemblen all the folk of our kinrede,
And make werre so sharpe in this contree,
That by som aventure, or som treetee,
Thou maist have hire to lady and to wif,
For whom that I must nedes lese my lif.
For, as by way of possibilitee,
Sith thou art at thy large of prison free,
And art a lord, gret is thine avantage,
More than is min, that sterve her in a cage;
For I may wepe and waile, while that I live,
With all the wo that prison may me yeve,
And eke with peine that love me yeveth also,
That doubleth all my tourment and my wo.
Therwith the fire of jalousie up sterte
Within his brest, and hent him by the herte
So woodyly, that he like was to behold
The boxe-tree, or the ashen, ded and cold.
Than said he: O cruel goddes, that governe
This world with binding of your word eterne,
And writen in the table of athamant,
Your parlement, and your eterne grant,
What is mankind more unto yhold
Than is the shepe, that rouketh in the fold?
For slain is man, right as another beest,
And dwelleth eke in prison, and arrest,
And hath siknesse, and gret adversite,
And often times gilteles parde.
What governance is in this prescience,
That gilteles turmenteth innocence?

And yet encreseth this all my penance,
That man is bounden to his observance,
For Goddes sake to leten of his will,
Ther as a beest may all his lust fulfill:
And when a beest is ded, he hath no peine;
But man, after his deth, mote wepe and pleine,
Though in this world he have care and wo,
Withouten doute it maye stonden so.
The answer of this lete I to divines,
But wel I wote, that in this world gret pine is.
Alas! I see a serpent or a thefe,
That many a trewe man hath do meschefe,
Gon at his large, and wher him lust may turn.
But I moste ben in prison thurgh Saturn,
And eke thurgh Juno, jalous and eke wood,
That hath wel neye destrued all the blood
Of Thebes, with his waste walles wide;
And Venus sleeth me on that other side,
For jalousie, and fere of him, Arcite.
Now wol I stent of Palamon a lite,
And leten him in his prison still dwelle,
And of Arcita forth I wol you telle.
The sommer passeth, and the nightes long,
Encresen double wise the peines strong
Both of the lover and of the prisoner;
I n'ot which hath the wofuller mistere:
For, shortly for to say, this Palamon
Perpetuelly is damned to prison,
In chaines and in fetters to ben ded;

And Arcite is exiled on his hed
For evermore, as out of that contree,
Ne never more he shal his lady see.
You lovers, axe I now this question,
Who hath the werse, Arcite, or Palamon?
That on may se his lady day by day,
But in prison moste he dwellen alway:
That other wher him lust may ride or go,
But sen his lady shal he never mo.
Now demeth as you liste, ye that can,
For I wil tell you forth, as I began.
When that Arcite to Thebes comen was,
Ful oft a day he swelt, and said, Alas!
For sen his lady shal he neuer mo.
And, shortly, to concluden all his wo,
So mochel sorwe hadde never creature
That is or shal be while the world may dure.
His slepe, his mete, his drinke, is him byraft,
That lene he wex, and drie as is a shaft.
His eyen holwe, and grisly to behold,
His hewe salowe, and pale as ashen cold;
And solitary he was, and ever alone,
And wailing all the night, making mone;
And if he herde song or instrument,
Than would he wepe, he mighte not be stent:
So feble were his spirites, and so low,
And changed so, that no man coude know
His speche ne his vois, though men it herd.
And in his gere, for all the world he ferd,

Nought only like the lovers maladie,
Of Ereos, but rather ylike manie,
Engendred of humours melancolike,
Beforne his hed in his celle fantastike.
And shortly turned was all up so down
Both habit and eke dispositioun
Of him, this woful lover Dan Arcite.
What shuld I all day of his wo endite?
Whan he endured had a yere or two
This cruel torment, and this peine and wo,
At Thebes, in his contree, as I said,
Upon a night in slepe as he him laid,
Him thought how that the winged god Mercury
Beforne him stood, and bad him be mery.
His slepy yerde in hond he bare upright;
An hat he wered upon his heres bright:
Arraied was this god, (as he toke kepe,)
As he was whan that Argus toke his slepe,
And said him thus: To Athenes shall thou wende,
Ther is thee shapen of thy wo an ende.
And with that word Arcite awoke and stert.
Now trewely how sore that ever me smert,
Quod he, to Athenes right now wol I fare;
Ne for no drede of deth shall I not spare
To se my lady, that I love and serve;
In hire presence I rekke not to sterve.
And with that word he caught a gret mirrour,
And saw that changed was all his colour,
And saw his visage all in another kind;

And right anon it ran him in his mind,
That sith his face was so disfigured
Of maladie, the which he had endured,
He might wel, if that he bare him lowe,
Live in Athenes evermore unknowe,
And sen his lady wel nigh day by day.
And right anon he changed his aray,
And clad him as a poure labourer;
And all alone (save only a squier,
That knew his privitie and all his cas,
Which was disguised pourely as he was,)
To Athenes is he gone the nexte way.
And to the court he went upon a day,
And at the gate he proffered his service,
To drugge and draw what so men wold devise.
And shortly of this matere for to sayn,
He fell in office with a chamberlain,
The which that dwelling was with Emelie;
For he was wise, and coude sone espie
Of every servent which that served hire:
Wel coud he hewen wood, and water bere,
For he was yonge and mighty for the nones,
And thereto he was strong and big of bones
To done that any wight can him devise.
A yere or two he was in this service,
Page of the chambre of Emelie the bright,
And Philostrate he sayde that he hight.
But half so wel beloved man as he
Ne was ther never in court of his degre.

He was so gentil of conditioun,
That thurghout all the court was his renoun.
They sayden that it were a charite
That Theseus wold enhaunse his degre,
And putten him in a worshipful service,
Ther as he might his vertues exercise.
And thus, within a while, his name is spronge,
Both of his dedes, and of his good tonge,
That Theseus had taken him so ner,
That of his chambre he made him squier,
And gave him gold to mainteine his degre;
And eke men brought him out of his contre
Fro yere to yere ful prively his rent;
But honestly and sleighly he it spent,
That no man wondred how that he it hadde.
And thre yere in this wise his lif he ladde,
And bare him so in pees and eke in werre,
Ther n'as no man that Theseus hath derre.
And in this blisse let I now Arcite,
And speke I wol of Palamon a lite.
In derkenesse and horrible and strong prison
This seven yere hath sitten Palamon,
Forpined, what for love and for distresse.
Who feleth double sorwe and hevinesse
But Palamon? that love distraineth so,
That wood out of his wit he goth for wo,
And eke therto he is a prisonere
Perpetuell, not only for a yere.
Who coude rime in English proprely

His martirdom? forsoth it am not I;
Therefore I passe as lightly as I may.
It fel that in the seventh yere, in May,
The thridde night, (as olde bokes sayn,
That all this storie tellen more plain,)
Were it by aventure or destinee,
(As when a thing is shapen, it shal be)
That sone after the midnight Palamon,
By helping of a frend, brake his prison,
And fleeth the cite faste as he may go,
For he had yeven drinke his gayler so,
Of a clarre, made of a certain wine,
With narcotikes and opie of Thebes fine,
That all the night, though that men wold him shake,
The gailer slept, he mighte not awake;
And thus he fleeth as faste as ever he may.
The night was short, and faste by the day,
That nedes cost he moste himselven hide,
And to a grove faste ther beside,
With dredful foot then stalketh Palamon,
For shortly this was his opinion,
That in that grove he wold him hide all day,
And in the night than wold he take his way
To Thebes ward, his frendes for to preie
On Theseus to helpen him werreie:
And shortly, eyther he wold lese his lif,
Or winnen Emelie unto his wif.
This is the effect, and his entente plein.
Now wol I turnen to Arcite agein,

That litel wist how neighe was his care,
Till that Fortune had brought him in the snare.
The besy larke, the messenger of day,
Salewith in hire song the morwe gray,
And firy Phebus riseth up so bright,
That all the orient laugheth of the sight;
And with his stremes drieth in the greves
The silver dropes hanging in the leves.
And Arcite, that is in the court real
With Theseus the squier principal,
Is risen, and loketh on the mery day;
And for to don his observance to May,
Remembring on the point of his desire,
He on his courser, stertering as the fire,
Is ridden to the felde him to pley,
Out of the court, were it a mile or twey,
And to the grove, of which that I you told,
By aventure, his way he gan to hold,
To maken him a gerlond of the greves,
Were it of woodbind or of hauthorn leves,
And loud he song agen the sonne shene.
O Maye, with all thy floures and thy grene,
Right welcome be thou, faire fresshe May,
I hope that I some grene here getten may.
And from his courser, with a lusty herte,
Into the grove ful hastily he sterte,
And in a path he romed up and down.
Ther, as by aventure this Palamon
Was in a bush, that no man might him se,

For sore afered of his deth was he:
Nothing ne knew he that it was Arcite,
God wot he wold have trowed it ful lite.
But soth is said, gon sithen are many yeres,
That feld hath eyen, and wood hath eres,
It is ful faire a man to bere him even,
For al day meten men at unset steven.
Ful litel wote Arcite of his felaw,
That was so neigh to herken of his saw;
For in the bush he sitteth now ful still.
Whan that Arcite had romed all his fill,
And songen all the roundel lustily,
Into a studie he fell sodenly,
As don these lovers in hir queinte geres,
Now in the crop, and now down in the breres;
Now up, now down, as boket in a well.
Right as the Friday, sothly for to tell,
Now shineth it, and now it raineth fast;
Right so can gery Venus overcast
The hertes of hire folk, right as hire day
Is gerfull, right so changeth she aray;
Selde is the Friday all the weke ylike.
Whan Arcite hadde ysonge, he gan to sike,
And set him down withouten any more:
Alas! quod he, the day that I was bore!
How longe, Juno, thurgh thy crueltee,
Wilt thou werreien Thebes the citee?
Alas! ybrought is to confusion
The blood real of Cadme and Amphion:

Of Cadmus, which that was the firste man
That Thebes built, or firste the toun began.
And of the citee firste was crowned king.
Of his linage am I, and his ofspring
By veray line, as of the stok real:
And now I am so caitif and so thral,
That he that is my mortal enemy
I serve him as his squier pourely.
And yet doth Juno me wel more shame;
For I dare not beknowe min owen name,
But ther, as I was wont to highte Arcite,
Now highte I Philostrat not worth a mite:
Alas! thou fell Mars; alas! thou Juno,
Thus hath your ire our linage all fordo,
Save only me, and wretched Palamon,
That Theseus martireth in prison;
And over all this, to slen me utterly,
Love hath his firy dart so brenningly
Ysticked thurgh my trewe careful hert,
That shapen was my deth erst than my shert.
Ye slen me with your eye, Emelie;
Ye ben the cause wherfore that I die.
Of all the remenant of min other care
Ne set I not the mountance of a tare,
So that I coud don ought to your plesance.
And with that word he fell doun in a trance
A longe time, and afterward up sterte.
This Palamon that thought thurghout his herte
He felt a colde swerd sodenly glide,

For ire he quoke, no lenger wolde he hide:
And whan that he had herd Arcites tale,
As he were wood, with face ded and pale,
He sterte him up out of the bushes thikke,
And sayde, False Arcite, false traitour wicke,
Now art thou hent, that lovest my lady so;
For whom that I have all this peine and wo,
And art my blood, and to my conseil sworn,
As I ful oft have told thee herebeforn:
And hast bejaped here Duk Theseus,
And falsely changed hast thy name thus;
I wol be ded, or elles thou shalt die:
Thou shalt not love my lady Emelie,
But I wol love hire only and no mo,
For I am Palamon, thy mortal fo.
And though that I no wepen have in this place,
But out of prison am astert by grace,
I drede nought that eyther thou shalt die,
Or thou ne shalt nat loven Emelie:
Chese which thou wilt, for thou shalt not asterte.
This Arcite tho, with ful dispitous herte,
Whan he him knew, and had his tale herd,
As fers as a leon, pulled out a swerd,
And sayde thus; By God, that sitteth above,
N'ere it that thou art sicke, and wood for love,
And eke that thou no wepen hast in this place,
Thou shuldest never out this grove pace,
That thou ne shuldest dien of min hond;
For I defie the suretee and the bond

Which that thou saist that I have made to thee.
What! veray fool, thinke wel that love is free
And I wol love her maugre all thy might:
But for thou art a worthy gentil knight,
And wilnest to darraine hire by bataille,
Have here my trouth, to morwe I will not faille,
Withouten weting of any other wight,
That here I wol be founden as a knight,
And bringen harneis right ynough for thee,
And chese the beste, and leve the werste for me:
And mete and drinke this night wol I bring
Ynough for thee, and cloathes for thy bedding;
And if so be that thou my lady win,
And sle me in this wode ther I am in,
Thou maist well have thy lady as for me.
This Palamon answered, I grant it thee.
And thus they ben departed till a morwe,
When eche of hem hath laid his faith to borwe.
O Cupide, out of alle charitee!
O regne, that wolt no felaw have with thee!
Ful soth is sayde, that love ne lordship
Wol nat, his thanks, have no felawship.
Wel finden that Arcite and Palamon.
Arcite is ridden anone unto the toun,
And on the morwe or it were day light,
Ful prively two harneis hath he dight,
Both suffisant and mete to darreine
The bataille in the field betwix hem tweine;
And on his hors, alone as he was borne,

He carieth all this harneis him beforne;
And the grove, at time and place ysette,
That Arcite and this Palamon ben mette.
Tho changen gan the colour in hir face,
Right as the hunter in the regne of Trace,
That stondesth at a gappe, with a spere,
Whan hunted is the lion or the bere,
And hereth him come rushing in the greves,
And breking bothe the boughes and the leves,
And thinketh, here cometh my mortal enemy,
Withouten faile he must be ded or I:
For eyther I mote slain him at the gappe,
Or he mote slen me, if that me mishappe.
So ferden they, in changing of hir hewe,
As fer as eyther of hem other knewe.
Ther n'as no good day, ne no saluing
But streit withouten wordes rehersing
Everich of hem halpe to armen other
As frendly as he were his owen brother;
And, after that, with sharpe speres strong
They foineden eche at other wonder long.
Thou mightest wenen, that this Palamon
In his fighting were a wood leon,
And as a cruel tigre was Arcite:
As wild bores gan they togeder smite,
That frothen white as fome for ire wood;
Up to the ancle fought they in hir blood;
And in this wise I let hem fighting dwelle,
As forth I wol of Theseus you telle.

The Destinee, ministre general,
That executeth in the world over al
The purveiance that God hath sen beforne,
So strong it is, that though the world hath sworne
The contrary of thing by ya or nay,
Yet sometime it shall fallen on a day
That falleth nat efte in a thousand yere:
For certainly our appetites here,
Be it of werre, or pees, or hate, or love,
All is this ruled by the sight above.
This mene I now by mighty Theseus,
That for to hunten is so desirous,
And namely at the gret hart in May,
That in his bed ther daweth him no day,
That he n'is clad, and redy for to ride
With hunte and horne, and houndes him beside:
For in his hunting hath he swiche delite,
That it is all his joye and appetite,
To ben himself the grete harts bane;
For after Mars he serveth now Diane.
Clere was the day, as I have told or this,
And Theseus, with alle joye and blis,
With his Ipolitia, the fayre quene,
And Emelie, yclothed all in grene,
On hunting ben thy ridden really,
And to the grove, that stood ther faste by,
In which ther was an hart, as men him told,
Duk Theseus the streite way hath hold,
And to the launde he rideth him ful right,

Ther was the hart ywont to have his flight,
And over a brooke, and so forth on his wey.
This duk wol have a cours at him or twey,
With houndes, swiche as him lust to commaunde.
And when this duk was comen to the launde,
Under the sonne he loked, and anon
He was ware of Arcite and Palamon,
That foughten breme, as it were bolles two;
The brighte swerdes wenten to and fro
So hidously, that with the leste stroke
It semed that it wold felle an oke:
But what they weren nothing he ne wote.
This duk his courser with his sporres smote,
And at a stert he was betwix hem two,
And pulled out a swerde, and cried, Ho!
No more, up peine of lesing of your hed;
By mighty Mars, he shall anon be ded
That smiteth any stroke that I may sen!
But telleth me what mistere men ye ben,
That ben so hardy for to fighten here
Withouten any juge or other officere,
As though it were in listes really?
This Palamon answered hastily,
And saide; Sire, what nedeth wordes mo?
We have the death deserved bothe two;
Two woful wretches ben we, two caitives,
That ben accombred of our owen lives;
And, as thou art a rightful lord and juge,
Ne yeve us neyther mercie ne refuge;

But sle me first for seinte charitee,
But sle my felaw eke as wel as me:
Or sle him first, for though thou know it lite,
This is thy mortal fo, this is Arcite,
That fro thy lond is banished on his hed,
For which he hath deserved to be ded;
For this is he that came unto thy gate,
And sayde that he highte Philostrate.
Thus hath he japed thee full many a yere,
And thou hast makid him thy chief squiere:
And this is he that loveth Emelie.
For sith the day is come that I shal die,
I make plainly my confession;
That I am thilke woful Palamon,
That hath thy prison broken wilfully;
I am thy mortal fo, and it am I
That loveth so hot Emelie the bright,
That I wold dien present in hire sight;
Therefore I axe deth and my jewise,
But sle my felaw in the same wise,
For both we have deserved to be slain.
This worthy duk answred anon again,
And sayd, This is a short conclusion,
Your owen mouth, by your confession,
Hath damned you, and I wol it recorde.
It nedeth not to pine you with the corde:
Ye shul be ded, by mighty Mars the rede.
The quene anon for veray womanhede
Gan for to wepe, and so did Emelie,

And all the ladies in the compaignie.
Gret pite was, it, as it thought hem alle,
That ever swiche a chance shulde befallē,
For gentil men they were of gret estat,
And nothing but for love was this debat;
And sawe hir bloody woundes wide and sore,
And alle criden bothe lesse and more,
Have mercie, lord, upon us wimmen alle,
And on hir bare knees adoun they falle,
And wold have kist his feet ther as he stood,
Till at the last, aslaked was his mood,
(For pitee renneth sone in gentil herte,)
And though he first for ire quoke and sterte,
He hath considered shortly in a clause,
The trespas of hem both, and eke the cause;
And although that his ire hir gilt accused,
Yet in his reson he hem both excused:
As thus; he thought wel that every man
Wol helpe himself in love, if that he can,
And eke deliver himself out of prison;
And eke his herte had compassion
Of wimmen, for they wepten ever in on,
And in his gentil herte he thoughte anon,
And soft unto himself he sayed, Fie
Upon a lord that wol have no mercie,
But be a leon both in word and dede,
To hem that ben in repentance and drede,
As wel as to a proud dispitous man,
That wol mainteinen that he first began.

That lord hath litel of discretion,
That in swiche cas can no division,
But weigheth pride and humblesse after on.
And shortly, when his ire is thus agon,
He gan to loken up with eyen light,
And spake these same wordes all on hight:
The god of Love, a *benedicite!*
How mighty, and how gret a lord is he!
Again his might ther gainen non obstacles,
He may be cleped a god for his miracles:
For he can maken at his owen gise
Of everich herte, as that him list devise.
Lo! here this Arcite, and this Palamon,
That quitely weren out of my prison,
And might have lived in Thebes really,
And weten I am hir mortal enemy,
And that hir deth lith in my might also,
And yet hath love maugre hir eyen two,
Ybrought hem hither bothe for to die.

Now loketh, is not this an heigh folie?

Who may ben a fool, but if he love?
Behold, for Goddes sake, that sitteth above,
Se how they blede! be they not wel araied?
Thus hath hir lord, the god of Love, hem paied
Hir wages and hir fees for hir service,
And yet they wenen for to be ful wise
That serven Love, for ought that may befall.

And yet is this the beste game of alle,
That she, for whom they have this jolite,
Con hem therfore as mochel thank as me.
She wot no more of alle this hote fare,
By God, than wot a cuckow or an hare.
But alle mote ben assaied hote or cold;
A man mot ben a fool, other yonge or old;
I wot it by myself ful yore agon;
For in my time a servant was I on:
And therefore sith I know of loves peine,
And wote how sore it can a man destreine;
As he that oft hath been caught in his las,
I you foryeve all holly this trespas,
At request of the quene, that kneleth here,
And eke of Emelie, my suster dere,
And ye shul both anon unto me swere
That never mo ye shul my contree dere,
Ne maken werre upon me night ne day,
But ben my frendes in alle that ye may.
I you foryeve this trespas every del.
And they him sware his axing fayr and wel;
And him of lordship and of mercie praid,
And he hem granted grace, and thus he said:
To speke of real linage and richesse,
Though that she were a quene or a princesse,
Eche of you bothe is worthy, douteles,
To wedden whan time is, but natheles
I speke as for my suster Emelie,
For whom ye have this strif and jalousie,

Ye wot yourself, she may not wedden two
At ones, though ye fighten evermo;
But on of you, al be him loth or lefe,
He mot gon pipen in an ivy lefe;
This is to say, she may not have you bothe,
Al be ye never so jalous, ne so wrothe:
And forthy I you put in this degree,
That eche of you shall have his destinee
As him is shape, and herkneth in what wise;
Lo here your ende, of that I shal devise.
My will is this, for plat conclusion,
Withouten any replication:
If that you liketh, take it for the beste,
That everich of you shal gon wher him lest,
Freely, withouten raunson or dangere;
And this day fifty wekes, ferre ne nere,
Everich of you shal bring an hundred knightes,
Armed for the listes up at all rightes,
Alle redy to darrein hire by bataille.
And this behete I you withouten faille,
Upon my trowth, and as I am a knight,
That whether of you bothe hath that might,
This is to sayn, that whether he or thou
May with his hundred, as I spake of now,
Sle his contrary, or out of listes drive,
Him shall I yeven Emelie to wive,
To whom that fortune yeveth so fayr a grace.
The listes shal I maken in this place;
And God so wisly on my soule rewe,

As I shal even juge ben, and trewe.
Ye shal non other ende with me maken,
That on of you ne shall be ded or taken;
And if you thinketh this is wel ysaid,
Saith your avis, and holdeth you apaid.
This is your ende, and your conclusion.
Who loketh lightly now but Palamon?
Who springeth up for joye but Arcite?
Who coud it tell, or who coud it endite,
The joye that is maked in the place,
Whan Theseus hath don so fayre a grace?
But doun on knees went every manere wight,
And thanked him with all hir hertes might,
And namely these Thebanes often sith.
And thus with good hope and with herte blith
They taken hir leve, and homeward gan they ride
To Thebes with his olde walles wide.
I trowe men wolde deme it negligence
If I foryete to tellen the dispence
Of Theseus, that goth so besily
To maken up the listes really,
That swiche a noble theatre as it was
I dare wel sayn in alle this world ther n'as.
The circuite a mile was aboute,
Walled of stone, and diked all withoute;
Round was the shape, in manere of a compas,
Ful of degrees, the hight of sixty pas,
That, whan a man was set on o degree,
He letted not his felaw for to see.

Estward ther stood a gate of marbel white,
Westward right swiche another in the opposite;
And shortly to concluden, swiche a place
Was never in erth, in so litel a space:
For in the lond ther n'as no craftes man
That geometrie or arsemetrike can,
Ne portreieur, ne kerver of images,
That Theseus ne yaf him mete and wages,
The theatre for to maken and devise.
And for to don his rite and sacrifice,
He estward hath upon the gate above,
In worship of Venus, goddessse of Love,
Don make an auter, and an oratorie;
And westward, in the minde and in memorie
Of Mars, he maketh right swich another,
That coste largely of gold a fother:
And northward, in a touret on the wall,
Of alabastre white, and red corall,
An oratorie, riche for to see,
In worship of Diane of chastitee,
Hath Theseus don wrought in noble wise.
But yet had I foryeten to devise
The noble kerving, and the portreitures,
The shape, the contenance, of the figures
That weren in these oratories three.
First, in the temple of Venus, maist thou see,
Wrought on the wall, ful pitous to beholde,
The broken slespes, and the sikes cold,
The sacred teres, and the waimentinges,

The firy strokes of the desiringes,
That Loves servantes in this lif enduren,
The othes that hir covenants assuren.
Plesance and Hope, Desire, Foolhardinesse,
Beaute and Youth, Baudrie and Richesse,
Charmes and Force, Lesinges and Flaterie,
Dispence, Besinesse, and Jalousie,
That wered of yelwe goldes a gerlond,
And hadde a cuckow sitting on hire hond;
Festes, instruments, and caroles, and dances,
Lust and array, and all the circumstances
Of Love, which that I reken, and reken shall,
By ordre weren peinted on the wall,
And mo than I can make of mention:
For sothly all the mount of Citheron,
Ther Venus hath hire principal dwelling,
Was shewed on the wall in purtreying,
With all the gardin, and the lustinesse:
Nought was foryeten the porter Idlenesse,
Ne Narcissus the fayrr, of yore agone,
Ne yet the folie of King Salomon,
Ne yet the grete strengthe of Hercules.
The enchantment of Medea and Circes,
Ne of Turnus the hardy fiers corage,
The riche Cresus, caitif in servage.
Thus may ye seen, that wisdom ne richesse,
Beaute ne sleighte, strengthe ne hardinesse,
Ne may with Venus holden champartie;
For as hire liste, the world may she gie.

Lo, all these folk so caught were in hire las,
Til they for wo ful often said, Alas!
Sufficeth here ensamples on or two,
And yet I coud reken a thousand mo.
The statue of Venus, glorious for to see,
Was naked fleting in the large see,
And, fro the navel doun, all covered was
With wawes grene, and bright as any glas:
A citole in hire right hand hadde she,
And on hire hed, ful semely for to see,
A rose gerlond fresh, and wel smelling;
Above hire hed, hire doves fleckering;
Before hire stood hire sone Cupido;
Upon his shoulders winges had he two,
And blind he was, as it is often sene;
A bow he bare, and arwes bright and kene.
Why shuld I not as wel eke tell you all
The purtreiture that was upon the wall,
Within the temple of mighty Mars the rede?
All painted was the wall in length and brede,
Like to the estres of the grisly place
That highte the gret temple of Mars in Trace:
In thilke colde and frosty region,
Ther as Mars hath his soveraine mansion.
First, on the wall was painted a forest,
In which ther wonneth nyther man ne best,
With knotty knarry barrien trees old,
Of stubbes sharpe, and hidous to behold.
In which ther ran a romble and a swough,

As though a storme shuld bresten every bough;
And downward from an hill, under a bent,
Ther stood the temple of Mars armipotent,
Wrought all of burned stele, of which the entree
Was longe and streite, and ghastly for to see;
And thereout came a rage and swiche a vise,
That it made all the gates for to rise.
The northern light in at the dore shone,
For window on the wall ne was ther none,
Thurgh which men mighten any light discerne.
The dore was all of athamant eterne,
Yclenched overthwart and endelong,
With yren tough, and for to make it strong,
Every piler, the temple to sustene,
Was tonne-gret, of yren bright and shene.
Ther saw I first the derk imagining
Of Felonie, and alle the compassing;
The cruel Ire, red as any glede;
The Pikepurse, and eke the pale Drede;
The Smiler, with the knife under the cloke;
The shepen brenning with the blake smoke;
The Treson of the mordring in the bedde;
The open Werre, with woundes all bebledde,
Conteke with blody knife Sharp menace;
All of chirking was that sorry place.
The sleer of himself yet saw I there,
His herte blood hath bathed all his here:
The naile ydriven in the shode on hight;
The cold Deth, with mouth gaping upright.

Amiddes of the temple sate Mischance,
With discomfort and sory countenance;
Yet saw I Woodnesse laughing in his rage,
Armed Complaint, Outhees, and fiers Outrage;
The carraine in the bush, with throte ycorven;
A thousand slain, and not of qualme ystorven;
The tirant with the prey by force yraft;
The toun destroyed, ther was nothing laft;
Yet saw I brent the shippes hoppesteres;
The hunte ystrangled with the wilde beres;
The sow freting the child right in the cradel;
The coke yscalded for all his long ladel:
Nought was foryete by the infortune of Marte,
The carter overridden with his carte,
Under the wheel ful low he lay a doun.
Ther were also of Martes division,
The armerer, and the bowyer, and the smith,
That forgeth sharp swerdes on the stith;
And all above, depeinted in a tour,
Saw I a Conquest, sitting in great honour,
With thilke sharp swerd over his hed
Yhanging by a subtil twined thred.
Depeinted was the slaughter of Julius,
Of gret Nero, and of Antonius:
All be that thilke time they were unborne,
Yet was hir deth depeinted ther beforne;
By menacing of Mars, right by figure,
So was it shewed in that portreiture,
As is depeinted in the cercles above,

Who shal be slaine, or elles ded for love.
Sufficeth on ensample in stories olde;
I may not reken hem alle though I wolde.
The statue of Mars upon a carte stood,
Armed, and loked grim, as he were wood;
And over his hed ther shinen two figures
Of sterres that ben cleped in scriptures,
That on Puella, that other Rubeus.
This god of Armes was araied thus:
A wolf ther stood beforne him at his fete,
With eyen red, and of a man he ete.
With subtil pensill peinted was this storie,
In redouting of Mars and of his glorie.
Now to the temple of Diane the chaste,
As shortly as I can, I wol me haste,
To tellen you of the descriptioun,
Depeinted by the walles up and down,
Of hunting and of shamefast chastitee.
Ther saw I how woful Calistope,
Whan that Diane agreved was with here,
Was turned from a woman til a bere,
And after was she made the lodesterre.
Thus was it peinted, I can say no ferre;
Hire sone is eke a sterre, as men may see.
There saw I Danè yturned til a tree;
I mene not hire the goddesse Diane,
But Peneus daughter, which that highte Danè.
Ther saw I Atteon, an hart ymaked,
For vengeance that he saw Diane all naked:

I saw how that his houndes have him caught,
And freten him, for that they knew him naught.
Yet peinted was a litel forthermore,
How Athalante hunted the wilde bore;
And Meleagre, and many another mo,
For which Diane wrought hem care and wo.
Ther saw I many another wonder storie,
The which me liste not drawn to memorie.
This goddessse on an hart ful heye sete,
With smale houndes all about hire fete,
And undernethe hire fete she hadde a mone,
Wexing it was, and shuld wanen sone.
In gaudy grene hire statue clothed was,
With bow in hond, and arwes in a cas;
Hire eyen cast she ful low adoun,
Ther Pluto hath his derke regioun.
A woman travailling was hire beforne,
But for hire child so longe was unborne,
Full pitously Lucina gan she call,
And sayed; Helpe, for thou mayest beste of all.
Wel coude he peinten lifly that it wrought,
With many a florein he the hewes bought.
Now ben these listes made, and Theseus,
That at his gret cost arraied thus
The temples, and the theatre everidel,
Whan it was don, him liked wonder wel.
But stint I wol of Theseus a lite,
And speke of Palamon and of Arcite.
The day approacheth of hir returning,

That everich shuld an hundred knightes bring
The bataille to darreine, as I you told;
And til Athenes hir covenant for to hold,
Hath everich of hem brought an hundred knightes
Wel armed for the werre at alle rightes;
And sikerly ther trowed many a man
That never sithen that the world began,
As for to speke of knighthood of hir hond,
As fer as God hath maked see and lond;
N'as of so fewe so noble a compaignie.
For every wight that loved chivalrie,
And wold his thanks han a passant name,
Hath praied that he might ben of that game,
And wel was him that therto chosen was,
For if ther fell to morwe such a cas,
Ye knowen wel that every lusty knight
That loveth *par amour*, and hath his might,
Were it in Englelond or elleswher,
They wold hir thanks willen to be ther.
To fight for a lady, a *benedicite*,
It were a lusty sight for to se.
And right so ferden they with Palamon,
With him there wenten knightes many on;
Som wol ben armed in an habergeon,
And in a brest-plate, and in a gipon;
And som wol have a pair of plates large,
And som wol have a Pruce sheld or a targe;
Som wol ben armed on his legges wele,
And have an axe, and some a mace of stele:

Ther n'is no newe guise, that it n'as old;
Armed they weren, as I have you told,
Everich after his opinion.

Ther maist thou se coming with Palamon,
Licurge himself, the gret King of Trace;
Black was his berd, and manly was his face;
The cercles of his eye in his hed
They gloweden betwixen yelwe and red;
And like a griffon loked he about,
With kemped heres on his browes stout;
His limmes gret, his braunes hard and stronge,
His shouldres brode, his armes round and longe:
And as the guise was in his contree,
Ful highe upon a char of gold stood he,
With foure white bolles in the trais.
Instede of a cote armure, on his harnais,
With nayles yelwe, and bright as any gold,
He hadde a bere's skin, cole-blake for old.
His longe here was kempt behind his bak,
As any ravnes fether it shone for blake.
A wreth of gold arm-gret, of huge weight,
Upon his hed, sate full of stones bright,
Of fine rubins and of diamans.
About his char ther wenten white alauns,
Twenty and mo, as gret as any stere
To huntun at the leon, or the dere,
And folwed him, with mosel fast ybound
Colered of gold, and torettes filed round:
An hundred lordes had he in his route,

Armed full wel, with hertes sterne and stoute.
With Arcita, in stories as men finde,
The gret Emetrius, the King of Inde,
Upon a stede bay, trapped in stele,
Covered with cloth of gold, diapred wele,
Came riding like the god of armes, Mars:
His cote armure was of a cloth of Tars,
Couched with perles white, round, and gret;
His sadel was of brent golde new ybete;
A mantelet, upon his shoulders hanging,
Bret-ful of rubies red, as fire sparkling,
His criske here like ringes was yronne,
And that was yelwe, and glitered as the sonne;
His nose was high, his eyen bright citrin,
His lippes round, his colour was sanguin,
A fewe fraknes in his face yspreint,
Betwixen yelwe and blake somdel ymeint;
And as a leon he his loking caste,
Of five-and-twenty yere his age I caste;
His berd was wel begonnen for to spring,
His vois was as a trompe thondering;
Upon his hed he wered, of laurer grene,
A gerlonde fresshe, and lusty for to sene;
Upon his honde he bare, for his deduit,
An egle tame, as any lily whit;
An hundred lordes had he with him there,
All armed save hir hedes in all hir gere,
Ful richely in alle manere thinges;
For trusteth wel, that erles, dukes, kinges,

Were gathered in this noble compaignie,
For love, and for encrease of chevalrie.
About this king ther ran, on every part,
Ful many a tame leon and leopart.
And in this wise, these lords all and some,
Ben on the Sondag to the citee come
Abouten prime, and in the toun alight.
This Theseus, this duk, this worthy knight,
Whan he had brought hem into his citee,
And inned hem, everich at his degree,
He festeth hem, and doth so gret labour
To easen hem, and don hem all honour,
That yet men wenen that no mannes wit
Of non estat ne coud amenden it.
The minstralcie, the service at the feste
The grete yeftes to the most and leste,
The riche array of Theseus paleis,
Ne who sate first, ne last, upon the deis,
What ladies fayrest ben, or best dauncing,
Or which of hem can carole best or sing,
Ne who most felingly speketh of love,
What haukes sitten on perche above,
What houndes ligger on the floor adoun,
Of all this now I make no mentioun.
But of the effect, that thinketh me the beste,
Now cometh the point, and herkeneth if you lest.
The Sondag nighte, or day began to spring,
Whan Palamon the larke herde sing,
Although it n'ere not day by houres two,

Yet sang the larke, and Palamon right tho
With holy herte, and with an high corage,
He rose, to wenden on his pilgrimage
Unto the blissful Citherea benigne,
I mene Venus, honourable and digne.
And in hire houre he walketh forth a pas
Unto the listes, ther hire temple was,
And down he kneleth, and with humble chere
And herte sore he sayde, as ye shul here:
Fayrest of fayre! O lady min Venus,
Daughter of Jove, and spouse to Vulcanus,
Thou glader of the mount of Citheron!
For thilke love thou haddest to Adon,
Have pitee on my bitter teres smerte,
And take myn humble prair at thin herte.
Alas! I ne have no langage to tell
The effecte, ne the torment of min hell;
Min herte may min harmes not bewrey;
I am so confuse that I cannot say:
But mercy, lady bright! that knowest wele
My thought, and seest what harmes that I fele:
Consider all this, and rue upon my sore,
As wisly as I shal for evermore
Emforth my might thy trewe servant be,
And holden werre alway with chastite;
That make I min avow, so ye me helpe,
I kepe nought of armes for to yelpe,
Ne axe I nat to-morwe to have victorie,
Ne renoun in this cas, ne vaine glorie

Of pris of armes, blowen up and down,
But I wold have fully possessioun
Of Emelie, and die in her servise:
Finde thou the manere how, and in what wise.
I rekke not but it may better be
To have victory of hem, or they of me,
So that I have my lady in min armes;
For though so be that Mars is god of armes,
Your vertue is so grete in heven above,
That, if you liste, I shal wel have my love.
Thy temple wol I worship evermo,
And on thin auter, wher I ride or go
I wol don sacrifice, and fires bete.
And if ye wol not so, my lady swete!
Than pray I you to-morwe with a spere,
That Arcita me thurgh the herte bere;
Than rekke I not when I have lost my lif
Though that Arcita win hire to his wif.
This is the effecte and ende of my praier,
Yeve me my love, thou blissful lady dere!
When the orison was don of Palamon,
His sacrifice he did, and that anon.
Ful pitously, with alle circumstances,
All tell I not as now his observances.
But at the last the statue of Venus shoke,
And made a signe, whereby that he toke,
That his praier accepted was that day;
For though the signe shewed a delay,
Yet wist he wel, that granted was his bone,

And with glad herte he went him home ful sone.
The thirddde hour inequal that Palamon
Began to Venus temple for to gon,
Up rose the sonne, and up rose Emelie,
And to the temple of Diane gan hie.
Hire maydens, that she thider with hire ladde
Ful redily with hem the fire they hadde,
The encense, the clothes, and the remenant all,
That to the sacrifice longen shall.
The hornes full of mede, as was the gise,
Ther lakked nought to don hire sacrificise.
Smoking the temple, full of clothes fayre,
This Emelie, with herte debonaire
Hire body wesshe with water of a well,
But how she did hire rite I dare not tell;
But it be any thing in generall,
And yet it were a game to heren all;
To him that meneth wel it n'ere no charge,
But it is good a man to ben at large.
Hire bright here kembed was, untressed all;
A coroune of a grene oke ceriall
Upon hire hed was set ful fayre and mete;
Two fires on the auter gan she bete,
And did hire thinges, as men may behold
In Stace of Thebes, and these bokes old.
Whan kendled was the fire, with pitous chere,
Unto Diane she spake, as ye may here:
O chaste goddessse of the wodes grene,
To whom both heven, and erth, and see, is sene,

Quene of the regne of Pluto, derke and lowe,
Goddesse of maidens that myn herte hast knowe
Ful many a yere, and wost what I desire,
As kepe me fro thy vengeance and thin ire,
That Atteon aboughte cruelly!
Chast goddesse! wel wotest thou that I
Desire to ben a mayden all my lif,
Ne never wol I be no love ne wif:
I am (thou wost) yet of thy compaignie,
A mayde, and love hunting and venerie,
And for to walken in the wodes wilde,
And not to ben a wife, and be with childe:
Nought wol I knowen compaignie of man;
Now helpe me, lady, sith you may and can;
For tho three formes that thou hast in thee:
And Palamon, that hath swiche love to me,
And eke Arcite, that loveth me so sore,
This grace I praie thee, withouten more,
As sende love and pees betwix hem two,
And fro me turne away hir hertes so,
That all hir hot love and hir desire,
And all hir besy torment, and hir fire
Be queinte, or torned in another place.
And if so be thou wolt not do me grace,
Or if my destinee be shapen so,
That I shal nedes have on of hem two,
As sende me him that most desireth me.
Beholde, goddesse of clene chastite,
The bitter teres that on my chekes fall,

Sin thou art a mayde, and keper of us all,
My maydenhede thou kepe, and well conserve,
And while I live a mayde I wol thee serve.
The fires brenne upon the auter clere,
While Emelie was thus in hire praier,
But sodenly she saw a sighte queinte;
For right anon on of the fires queinte
And quiked again, and after that, anon
That other fire was queinte, and all agon;
And as it queinte, it made a whisteling,
As don these brondes wet in hir brenning;
And at the brondes ende outran anon,
As it were bloody dropes many on;
For which, so sore agast was Emelie,
That she was well neigh mad, and gan to crie;
For she ne wiste what it signified,
But only for the fere thus she cried,
And wept, that it was pitee for to here.
And therewithall Diane gan appere
With bow in hond, right as an hunteresse,
And sayde, Doughter, stint thin hevinesse.
Among the goddes highe it is affermed,
And by eterne word written and confermed,
Thou shalt be wedded unto on of tho
That han for thee so mochel care and wo,
But unto which of hem I may not tell.
Farewel! for here I may no longer dwell:
The fires, which that on min auter brenne,
Shal thee declaren, er that thou go henne,

Thin aventure of love as in this case.
And, with that word, the arwes in the case
Of the goddesse clatteren fast and ring,
And forth she went, and made a vanishing;
For which this Emelie astonied was,
And sayde, What amounteth this, alas!
I put me in thy protection,
Diane, and under thy disposition.
And home she goth anon the nexte way.
This is the effecte; there n'is no more to say.
The next houre of Mars folwing this,
Arcite unto the temple walked is
Of fierce Mars to don his sacrificise,
With all the rites of his payen wise:
With pitous herte and high devotion,
Right thus to Mars he sayde his orison:
O stronge God, that in the regnes cold
Of Trace honoured art, and lord yhold,
And hast in every regne, and every lond
Of armes, all the bridel in thin hond,
And hem fortunest as thee list devise,
Accept of me my pitous sacrificise!
It so be that my youthe may deserve,
And that my might be worthy for to serve
Thy godhed, that I may ben on of thine;
Than prairie thee to rewe upon my pine;
For thilke peine, and thilke hot fire,
In which thou whilom brendest for desire,
Whanne that thou usedest the beautee

Of fayre yonge Venus fresshe and free,
And haddest hire in armes at thy wille;
Although thee ones on a time misfille,
Whan Vulcanus had caught thee in his las,
And fond thee ligging by his wif, alas!
For thilke sorwe that was tho in thin herte,
Have reuthe as wel upon my peines smerte.
I am yonge and unkonning as thou wost,
And, as I trow, with love offended most,
That ever was ony lives creature;
For she that doth me all this wo endure
Ne recceh never whether I sinke or flete;
And wel I wote, or she me mercy hete,
I moste with strengthe win hire in the place:
And wel I wote, withouten helpe or grace
Of thee, ne may my strengthe not availle:
Than help me, Lord, to-morwe in my bataille,
For thilke fire that whilom brenned thee,
As wel as that this fire now brenneth me,
And do, that I to-morwe may han victorie;
Min be the travaille, and thin be the glorie.
Thy souveraine temple wol I most honouren
Of ony place, and alway most labouren
In thy plesance, and in thy craftes strong,
And in thy temple I wol my baner hong,
And all the armes of my compaignie,
And evermore, until that day I die,
Eterne fire I wol beforene thee find;
And eke to this avow I wol me bind.

My berd, my here, that hangeth long adoun,
That never yet felt non offensioun,
Of rasour ne of shere, I wol thee yeve,
And ben thy trewe servant while I live.
Now, Lord, have reuth upon my sorwes sore,
Yeve me the victorie, I axe thee no more.
The praier stint of Arcita the stronge,
The ringes on the temple dore that honge,
And eke the dores, clattereden ful fast,
Of which Arcita somewhat him agast.
The fires brent upon the auter bright,
That it gan all the temple for to light,
A swete smel anon the ground up yaf,
And Arcita anon his hond up haf,
And more encense into the fire he cast,
With other rites mo; and, at the last,
The statue of Mars began his hauberke ring,
And with that soun he herd a murmuring
Ful low and dim, that said thus, Victory;
For which he yaf to Mars honour and glorie.
And thus with joye, and hope wel to fare,
Arcite anon unto his inne is fare,
As fayn as foul is of the brighte sonne;
And right anon swiche strif ther is begonne,
For thilke granting in the heven above,
Betwixen Venus, the goddessse of Love,
And Mars, the sterne god armipotent,
That Jupiter was besy it to stent,
Til that the pale Saturnus the Colde,

That knew so many of adventures olde,
Fond in his olde experience and art,
That he ful sone hath plesed every part.
As sooth is sayd, elde hath gret avantage;
In elde is both wisdom and usage:
Men may the old out-renne, but not out-rede.
Saturne anon, to stenten strif and drede,
Albeit that it is again his kind,
Of all this strif he gan a remedy find.
My dere doughter Venus, quod Saturne,
My cours, that hath so wide for to turne,
Hath more power than wot any man.
Min is the drenching in the see so wan,
Min is the prison in the derke cote,
Min is the strangel and hanging by the throte,
The murmure, and the cherles rebelling,
The groyning, and the privy enpoysoning.
I do vengeaunce and pleine correction
While I dwelt in the signe of the Leon.
Min is the ruine of the highe halles,
The falling of the toures and of the walles
Upon the minour, or the carpenter;
I slew Samson in shaking the piler.
Min ben also the maladies colde,
The derke tresons and the castes olde:
My loking is the fader of pestilence.
Now wepe no more; I shal do diligence
That Palamon, that is thin owen knight,
Shal have his lady as thou hast him hight.

Thogh Mars shal help his knight yet natheles,
Betwixen you ther mot sometime be pees:
All be ye not of o complexion,
That causeth all day swiche division.
I am thine ayel, redy at thy will;
Wepe now no more, I shall thy lust fulfill.
Now wol I stenten of the goddes above,
Of Mars and of Venus, goddesse of Love,
And tellen you as plainly as I can
The gret effect for which that I began.
Gret was the feste in Athenes thilke day,
And eke the lusty seson of that May,
Made every wight to ben in swiche plesance,
That all that Monday justen they and dance,
And spenden it in Venus highe servise;
But by the cause that they shulden rise
Erly a-morwe, for to seen the sight,
Unto hir reste wenten they at night.
And on the morwe, whan the day gan spring,
Of hors and harneis, noise and clattering,
Ther was in the hostelries all aboute;
And to the paleis rode ther many a route
Of lordes upon stedes and palfreis.
There mayest thou see devising of harneis,
So uncouth, and so riche, and wrought so wele,
Of goldsmithry, of brouding, and of stele;
The sheldes brighte, testeres and trappures,
Gold-hewen helmes, hauberkes, cote armures,
Lordes in parentes, on hir courseres,

Knights of retenu, and eke squires,
Nailing the speres, and helmes bokeling,
Guiding of sheldes, with lainers lacing;
Ther, as nede is, they weren nothing idel;
The fomy stedes on the golden bridel
Gnawing, and fast the armurers also
With file and hammer priking to and fro;
Yemen on foot, and communes many on
With shorte staves, thicke as they may gon;
Pipes, trompes, nakeres, and clariounes,
That in the bataille blowne bloody sounes;
The paleis full of peple up and down,
Here three, ther ten, holding hir questioun,
Devining of these Theban knightes two.
Som sayden thus, som sayde it shall be so;
Som helden with him with the blacke berd,
Som with the balled, som with the thick herd;
Some saide he loked grim, and wolde fighte,
He hath a sparth of twenty pound of wighte.
Thus was the halle full of divining,
Long after that the sonne gan up spring.
The gret Theseus that of his slepe is waked
With minstralcie and noise that was made,
Held yet the chambre of his paleis riche,
Til that the Theban knightes bothe yliche
Honoured were, and to the paleis fette.
Duk Theseus is at the window sette,
Araied right as he were a god in trone;
The peple preset thiderward ful sone,

Him for to seen, and don high reverence,
And eke to herken his heste and his sentence.
An heraud on a scaffold made an o,
Til that the noise of the peple was ydo,
And whan he saw the peple of noise al still,
Thus shewed he the mighty dukes will.
The lord hath of his high discretion
Considered that it were destruction
To gentil blood to fighten in the gise
Of mortal bataille now in this emprise;
Wherefore to shapen that they shul not die,
He wol his firste purpos modifie.
No man therefore, up peine of losse of lif,
No maner shot, ne pollax, ne short knif,
Into the listes send, or thider bring,
Ne short swerd to stike with point biting,
No man ne draw, ne bere it by his side,
Ne no man shal unto his felaw ride
But o cours, with a sharpe ygrounden spere;
Foin if him list on foot, himself to were;
And he that is at meschief shal be take,
And not slaine, but be brought unto the stake
That shal ben ordeined on eyther side;
Thider he shal by force, and ther abide;
And if so fall the chevetain be take
On eyther side, or elles sleth his make,
No longer shal the tourneying ylast.
God spede you; goth forth and lay on fast:
With longe swerd and with mase fighteth your fill.

Goth now your way; this is the lordes will.
The vois of the peple touched to the heven,
So loude crieden they with mery steven,
God save swiche a lorde that is so good,
He wilneth no destruction of blood.
Up gon the trompes and the melodie,
And to the listes rit the compaignie
By ordinance, thurghout the cite large,
Hanged with cloth of gold, and not with sarge.
Ful like a lord this noble duk gan ride,
And these two Thebans upon eyther side,
And after rode the Quene and Emelie,
And after that another compaignie,
Of on and other after hir degree;
And thus they passen thurghout the citee,
And to the listes comen they be time;
It n'as not of the day yet fully prime.
Whan set was Theseus ful riche and hie,
Ipolita the quene, and Emelie,
And other ladies in degrees aboute,
Unto the setes preseth all the route.
And westward, thurgh the gates under Mart,
Arcite, and eke the hundred of his part,
With baner red, is entred right anon;
And in the selve moment Palamon
Is, under Venus, estward in the place,
With baner white, and hardy chere and face:
And in al the world, to seken up and doun,
So even without variation

Ther n'ere swiche compaignies never twey;
For ther was non so wise that coude sey,
That any hadde of other avantage
Of worthinesse, ne of estat, ne age;
So even were they chosen for to gesse:
And in two renges fayre they hem dresse.
Whan that hir names red were everich on,
That in her nombre gile were ther non,
Tho were the gates shette, and cried was loude,
Do now your devoir, yonge knightes proude.
The heraudes left hir priking up and down.
Now ringin trompes loude, and clarioun.
Ther is no more to say, but este and west
In goth the speres sadly in the rest;
In goth the sharpe spore into the side;
Ther see men who can juste and who can ride
Ther shiveren shaftes upon sheldes thicke;
He feleth thurgh the herte-spone the pricke:
Up springen speres, twenty foot on highte;
Out gon the swerdes as the silver brighte:
The helmes they to-hewen and to-shrede;
Out brest the blod with sterne stremes rede:
With mighty maces, the bones they to-breste;
He thurgh the thickest of the throng gan threste:
There stomblen stedes strong, and down goth all;
He rolleth under foot as doth a ball:
He foineth on his foo with a tronchoun,
And he him hurtleth with his hors adoun:
He thurgh the body is hurt, and sith ytake

Maugre his hed, and brought unto the stake,
As forword was, right ther he must abide;
Another lad is on that other side:
And sometime doth hem Theseus to reste,
Hem to refresh, and drinken if hem lest.
Ful oft a day han thilke Thebanes two
Togeder met and wrought eche other wo:
Unhorsed hath eche other of hem twey.
Ther n'as no tigre in the vale of Galaphey,
Whan that hire whelpe is stole whan it is lite,
So cruel on the hunt as is Arcite
For jalous herte upon this Palamon:
Ne in Belmarie ther n'is so fell leon
That hunted is, or for his hunger wood,
Ne of his prey desireth so the blood,
As Palamon to sleen his foo Arcite:
The jalous strokes on hir helmes bite;
Out renneth blood on both hir sides rede.
Somtime an end there is of every dede;
For, er the sonne unto the reste went,
The strong King Emetrius gan hent
This Palamon, as he fought with Arcite,
And made his swerd depe in his flesh to bite;
And by the force of twenty is he take
Unyolden, and ydrawen to the stake:
And in the rescous of this Palamon
The stronge King Licurge is borne adoun;
And King Emetrius, for all his strengthe,
Is borne out of his sadel a swerdes lengthe,

So hitte him Palamon or he were take:
But all for nought, he was brought to the stake:
His hardy herte might him helpen naught;
He moste abiden whan that he was caught,
By force, and eke by composition.
Who sorweth now but woful Palamon,
That moste no more gon again to fight?
And whan that Theseus had seen that sight,
Unto the folk that foughten thus ech on,
He cried, Ho!¹ no more, for it is don.
I wol be true juge, and not partie.
Arcite of Thebes shal have Emelie,
That by his fortune hath hire fayre ywonne.
Anon ther is a noise of peple begonne
For joye of this, so loud and high withall
It seemed that the listes shulden fall.
What can now fayre Venus don above?
What saith she now? What doth this quene of Love?
But wepeth so, for wanting of hire will,
Til that hire teres in the listes fill:
She sayde, I am ashamed douteles.
Saturnus sayde, Daughter, hold thy pees:
Mars hath his will, his knight hath all his bone,
And, by min hed, thou shall ben esed sone.
The trompoures, with the loud minstralcie,
The heraudes, that so loude yell and crie,

¹ "If the King's Majesty say but Ho! or give any other signal, then they who are within the lists, with the constable and marshal, throwing their lances between the appelland and defendand, so part them." —*The Ancient Method of Duels before the King.*

Ben in hir joye for wele of Dan Arcite.
But herkeneth me, and stenteth noise a lite,
Whiche a miracle ther befell anon.
This fierce Arcite hath of his helme ydon,
And on a courser for to shew his face
He priketh endlong the large place,
Loking upward upon this Emelie,
And she again him cast a frendlich eye,
(For women, as to speken in commune,
They folwen all the favour of Fortune.)
And was all his in chere as his in herte.
Out of the ground a fury infernal sterte,
From Pluto sent, at requeste of Saturne,
For which his hors for fere gan to turne,
And lepte aside, and foundred as he lepe;
And er that Arcite may take any kepe,
He pight him on the pomel of his hed,
That in the place he lay as he were ded,
His breste to-brosten with his sadel bow;
As blake he lay as any cole or crow,
So was the blood yronnen in his face.
Anon he was yborne out of the place,
With herte sore, to Theseus paleis:
Tho was he corven out of his harneis,
And in a bed ybrought ful fayre and blive,
For he was yet in memorie and live,
And alway crying after Emelie.
Duk Theseus, with all his compaignie,
Is comen hom to Athens, his citee,

With alle blisse and gret solempnite.
Al be it that this aventure was falle
He n'olde not discomforten hem alle.
Men sayden eke that Arcite shal not die,
He shal ben heled of his maladie.
And of another thing they were as fayn,
That of hem alle was ther non yslain,
Al were they sore yhurt, and namely on,
That with a spere was thirled his brest bone.
To other woundes, and to broken armes,
Som hadden salves, and some hadden charmes;
And fermacies of herbes, and eke save
They dronken, for they wold hir lives have:
For which this noble duk, as he wel can,
Comforteth and honoureth every man,
And made revel all the longe night
Unto the strange lordes, as was right.
Ne ther n'as holden no discomforting
But as at justes, or a tourneying;
For sothly ther n'as no discomfiture,
For falling n'is not but an aventure:
Ne to be lad by force unto a stake
Unyolden, and with twenty knightes take,
O person all alone, withouten mo,
And haried forth by armes, foot, and too,
And eke his stede driven forth with staves,
With footmen, bothe yemen and eke knaves,
It was aretted him no villanie;
Ther may no man clepen it cowardie.

For which anon Duk Theseus let crie,
To stenten alle rancour and envie,
The gree as wel of o side as of other,
And eyther side ylike, as others brother;
And yave hem giftes after hir degree,
And helde a feste fully dayes three;
And conveyed the kinges worthily
Out of his toun a journee largely;
And home went every man the righte way;
Ther n'as no more but farewell, have good day.
Of this bataille I wol no more endite,
But speke of Palamon and of Arcite.
Swelleth the brest of Arcite, and the sore
Encreseth at his herte more and more.
The clotered blood for any leche-craft
Corrumpeth, and is in his bouke ylaft,
That neyther vine-blood ne ventousing,
Ne drinke of herbes, may ben his helping.
The vertue expulsif, or animal,
Forthilke vertue cleped natural,
Ne may the venime voiden ne expell;
The pipes of his longes gan to swell,
And every lacerte in his brest adoun
Is shent with venime and corruption.
Him gaineth neyther for to get his lif
Vomit upward ne dounward laxatif:
All is to brosten thilke region;
Nature hath now no domination:
And certainly ther nature wol not werche.

Farewel physike; go bere the man to cherche.
This is all and som, that Arcite moste die;
For which he sendeth after Emelie,
And Palamon, that was his cosin dere;
Than sayd he thus, as ye shuln after here:
Nought may the woful spirit in myn herte
Declare o point of all my sorwes smerte
To you, my lady, that I love most;
But I bequethe the service of my gost
To you aboven every creature,
Sin that my lif ne may no lenger dure.
Alas! the wo, alas! the peines strong,
That I for you have suffered, and so long;
Alas! the deth; alas! mine Emelie;
Alas! departing of our compaignie;
Alas! min hertes quene; alas! my wif;
Min hertes ladie! ender of my lif!
What is this world? what axen men to have?
Now with his love, now in his colde grave
Alone withouten any compaignie.
Farewel, my swete! farewel, min Emelie!
And softe take me in your armes twey,
For love of God, and herkeneth what I sey.
I have here with my cosin Palamon
Had strif and rancour many a day agon
For love of you, and for my jalousie;
And Jupiter so wis my soule gie,
To speken of a servant properly,
With alle circumstances trewely,

That is to sayn, trouth, honour, and knighthede,
Wisdom, humblesse, estat, and high kinrede,
Freedom, and all that longeth to that art,
So Jupiter have of my soule part,
As in this world right now ne know I non
So worthy to be loved as Palamon,
That serveth you, and wol don all his lif;
And if that ever ye shal ben a wif,
Foryete not Palamon, the gentil man.
And with that word his speche faille began;
For from his feet up to his brest wos come
The cold of deth, that had him overnome;
And yet moreover in his armes two
The vital strength is lost and all ago;
Only the intellect, withouten more,
That dwelled in his herte sike and sore,
Gan failen whan the herte felt deth;
Dusked his eyen two, and failed his breth:
But on his ladie yet cast he his eye;
His laste word was, Mercy, Emelie!
His spirit changed hous, and wente ther
As I cam never I cannot tellen wher;
Therefore I stent, I am no divinistre;
Of soules find I not in this registre:
Ne me lust not the opinions to telle
Of hem, though that they written wher they dwelle.
Arcite is cold, ther Mars his soule gie.
Now wol I speken forth of Emelie.
Shright Emelie, and houleth Palamon,

And Theseus his sister toke anon
Swouning, and bare her from the corps away.
What helpeth it to tarien forth the day,
To tellen how she wepe both even and morwe?
For in swiche cas wimmen have swiche sorwe,
Whan that hir hosbonds ben fro hem ago,
That for the more part they sorwen so,
Or elles fallen in swiche maladie,
That atte last certainly they die.
Infinite ben the sorwes and the teres
Of olde folk, and folk of tendre yeres,
In all the toun, for deth of this Theban;
For him ther wepeth bothe child and man:
So gret weping was ther non certain,
Whan Hector was ybrought, all fresh yslain,
To Troie: Alas! the pitee that was there;
Cratching of chekes, rending eke of here.
Why woldest thou be ded, these women crie,
And haddest gold ynough, and Emelie?
No man might gladen this Duk Theseus,
Saving his olde fader Egeus,
That knew this worldes transmutation,
As he had seen it chaungen up and down,
Joye after wo, and wo after gladnesse,
And shewed him ensample and likenesse.
Right as ther died never man, (quod he,)
That he ne lived in erth in som degree,
Right so ther lived never man, (he seyde,)
In all this world, that sometime he ne deyde:

This world n'is but a thurghfare, ful of wo,
And we ben pilgrimes, passing to and fro:
Deth is an end of every worldes sore
And over all this yet said he mochel more,
To this effect, ful wisely to enhort
The peple, that they shuld hem recomfort.
Duk Theseus, with all his besy cure,
He casteth now, wher that the sepulture
Of good Arcite may best ymaked be,
And eke most honourable in his degree;
And at the last he toke conclusion,
That ther as first Arcite and Palamon
Hadden for love the bataille hem betwene,
That in that selve grove, sote and grene,
Ther as he hadde his amorous desires,
His complaint, and for love his hote fires;
He wold make a fire, in which the office
Of funeral he might all accomprise;
And let anon commande to hack and hewe
The okes old, and lay hem on a rew
In culpons, wel arraied for to brenne.
His officers with swifte feet they renne
And ride anon at his commandement.
And after this, this Theseus hath sent
After a bere, and it all overspradde
With cloth of gold, the richest that he hadde;
And of the same suit he cladde Arcite.
Upon his hondes were his gloves white,
Eke on his hed a croune of laurer grene,

And in his hond a swerd ful bright and kene.
He laid him bare the visage on the bere,
Therwith he wept that pitee was to here;
And for the peple shulde seen him alle,
Whan it was day, he brought him to the halle,
That roreth of the crying, and the soun.
Tho came this woful Theban, Palamon,
With flotery berd, and ruggy ashy heres,
In clothes blake, ydropped all with teres,
And (passing over of weping Emelie)
The reufullest of all the compaignie.
And in as much as the service shuld be
The more noble, and riche in his degree,
Duk Theseus let forth three stedes bring,
That trapped were in stele all glittering,
And covered with the armes of Dan Arcite;
And eke upon these stedes, gret and white,
Ther saten folk, of which on bare his sheld,
Another his spere up in his hondes held;
The thridde bare with him his bow Turkeis,
Of brent gold was the cas and the harneis;
And riden forth a pas with sorweful chere
Toward the groue, as ye shal after here.
The noblest of the Grekes that ther were
Upon hir shuldres carrieden the bere,
With slacke pas, and eyen red and wete,
Thurghout the citee, by the maister strete,
That sprad was al with black, and wonder hie,
Right of the same is all the strete ywrie.

Upon the right hand went olde Egeus,
And on the other side, Duk Theseus,
With vessels in hir hond of gold ful fine,
All ful of hony, milk, and blood, and wine;
Eke Palamon, with ful gret compaignie,
And after that came woful Emelie,
With fire in hond, as was that time the gise,
To don the office of funeral service.
High labour and ful gret apparailing
Was at the service of that fire making,
That with his grene top the heaven raught,
And twenty fadom of bred the armes straught;
This is to sain, the boughes were so brode,
Of stre first ther was laied many a lode.
But how the fire was maked up on highte,
And eke the names how the trees highte,
As oke, fir, birch, aspe, alder, holm, poplere,
Wilow, elm, plane, ash, box, chestein, lind, laurere,
Maple, thorn, beche, hasel, ew, whipultre,
How they were feld, shal not be told for me;
Ne how the goddes rannen up and down,
Disherited of hir habitatioun;
In which they woneden in rest and pees,
Nimphes, Faunes, and Amidriades;
Ne how the bestes, and the birddes alle
Fledden for fere whan the wood gan falle;
Ne how the ground agast was of the light,
That was not wont to see the sonne bright;
Ne how the fire was couched first with stre,

And than with drie stickes cloven a-thre,
And than with grene wood and spicerie,
And than with cloth of gold and with perrie,
And garlonds hanging with ful many a flour,
The mirre, the encense also, with swete odour;
Ne how Arcita lay among all this,
Ne what richesse about his body is;
Ne how that Emelie, as was the gise,
Put in the fire of funeral service;
Ne how she swounded, whan she made the fire,
Ne what she spake, ne what was hire desire;
Ne what jewelles men in the fire caste,
Whan that the fire was gret, and brente fast;
Ne how som cast hir sheld, and som hir spere,
And of hir vestimentes, which they were,
And cuppes full of wine, and milk, and blood,
Into the fire, that brent as it were wood;
Ne how the Grekes, with a huge route,
Three times riden all the fire aboute
Upon the left hond, with a loud shouting,
And thries with hir speres clatering;
And thries how the ladies gan to crie;
Ne how that led was homeward Emelie;
Ne how Arcite is brent to ashen cold;
Ne how the liche-wake was yhold
All thilke night; ne how the Grekes play;
The wake-plaies ne kepe I not to say;
Who wrestled best naked, with oile enoint,
Ne who that bare him best in no disjoint:

I woll not tellen eke how they all gon
Home till Athenes, whan the play is don.
But shortly to the point now wol I wende,
And maken of my longe tale an ende.
By processe, and by lengths of certain yeres,
All stenten is the mourning and the teres
Of Grekes, by on general assent:
Than semeth me ther was a parlement
At Athenes, upon certain points and cas;
Amonges the which points yspoken was
To have with certain contrees alliance,
And have of Thebanes fully obeisance;
For which this noble Theseus anon
Let senden after gentil Palamon.
Unwist of him what was the cause, and why:
But in his blacke clothes sorwefully
He came at his commandment on hie;
Tho sente Theseus for Emelie.
Whan they were set, and husht was al the place,
And Theseus abiden hath a space,
Or any word came from his wise brest,
His eye set he ther as was his lest,
And with a sad visage he siked still,
And after that right thus he sayd his will.
The firste Mover of the cause above,
Whan he firste made the fayre chaine of love,
Gret was the effect, and high was his entent;
Well wist he why, and what therof he ment:
For with that fayre chaine of love he bond

The fire, the air, the watre, and the lond,
In certain bondes, that they may not flee:
That same prince and mover eke, quod he,
Hath stablisht, in this wretched world adoun,
Certain of dayes and duration,
To all that are engendred in this place,
Over the which day they ne mow not pace,
Al mow they yet the dayes well abrege.
Ther nedeth non autoritee allege,
For it is preved by experience,
But that me lust declaren my sentence.
Than may men by this ordre well discerne,
That thilke Mover stable is and eterne;
Wel may men knowen, but it be a fool,
That every part deriveth from his hool;
For Nature hath not taken his beginning
Of no partie ne cantel of a thing,
But of a thing that parfit is and stable,
Descending so til it be corruppable;
And therefore of his wise purveyance
He hath so wel beset his ordinance,
That speses of thinges and progressions
Shullen enduren by successions,
And not eterne, withouten any lie;
This maist thou understand, and seen at eye.
Lo the oke, that hath so long a norishing
Fro the time that it ginneth first to spring,
And hath so long a lif, as ye may see,
Yet at the laste wasted is the tree.

Considereth eke how that the harde stone
Under our feet, on which we trede and gone,
It wasteth, as it lieth by the wey;
The brode river sometime wexeth drey;
The grete tounes see we wane and wende;
Than may ye see that all thing hathe an ende.
Of man and woman see we wel also,
That nedes in on of the termes two,
That is to sayn, in youthe, or elles age,
He mote be ded, the king as shall a page;
Som in his bed, som in the depe see,
Som in the large feld, as ye may see:
Ther helpeth nought, all goth that ilke wey;
Than may I sayn, that alle thing mote dey.
What maketh this but Jupiter the King,
The which is prince and cause of alle thing,
Converting alle unto his propre wille,
From which it is derived, soth to telle?
And here-againes no creature on live
Of no degree availleth for to strive.
Than is it wisdom, as it thinketh me,
To maken vertue of necessite,
And take it wel that we may not eschewe,
And namely that to us all is dewe;
And whoso, grutcheth ought he doth folie,
And rebel is to him that all may gie.
And certainly a man hath most honour
To dien in his excellence and flour,
Whan he is siker of his goode name;

Than hath he don his frend ne him no shame;
And glader ought his frend ben of his deth,
Whan with honour is yolden up his breth,
Than whan his name appalled is for age,
For all foryette[n] is his vassalage:
Than is it best as for a worthy fame,
To dein whan a man is best of name.
The contrary of all this is wilfulnesse.
Why grutchen we? why have we hevinesse,
That good Arcite, of chivalry the flour,
Departed is, with dutee and honour,
Out of this foule prison of this lif?
Why grutchen here his cosin and his wif
Of his welfare, that loven him so wel?
Can he hem thank? nay, God wot, never a del,
That both his soule and eke himself offend,
And yet they mow her lustres not amend.
What may I conclude of this longe serie,
But after sorwe I rede us to be merie,
And thanken Jupiter of all his grace;
And er that we departen from this place,
I rede that we make of sorwes two
O parfit joye lasting evermo:
And loketh now wher most sorwe is herein,
Ther wol I firste amenden and begin.
Sister, (quod he) this is my full assent,
With all the avis here of my parlement,
That gentil Palamon, your owen knight,
That serveth you with will, and herte, and might,

And ever hath don sin you first him knew,
That ye shall of your grace upon him rew,
And taken him for husband and for lord:
Lene me your hand, for this is oure accord.
Let see now of your womanly pitee:
He is a kinges brothers sone pardee;
And though he were a poure bachelere,
Sin he hath served you so many a yere,
And had for you so gret adversite,
It moste ben considered, leveth me,
For gentil mercy oweth to passen right.
Than sayed he thus to Palamon the knight;
I trow their nedeth litel sermoning
To maken you assenten to this thing.
Cometh ner, and take your lady by the hond.
Betwixen hem was maked anon the bond
That highte matrimoine or mariage,
By all the conseil of the baronage;
And thus with alle blisse and melodie
Hath Palamon ywedded Emelie;
And God, that all this wide world hath wrought,
Send him his love that hath it dere ybought.
For now is Palamon in alle wele,
Living in blisse, in richesse, and in hele,
And Emelie him loveth so tendrely,
And he hire serveth all so gentilly,
That never was ther no word hem betwene
Of jalousie, ne of non other tene.
Thus endeth Palamon and Emelie;

And God save all this fayre compaignie.

THE NONNES PREESTES TALE

A poure widewe, somdel stoupen in age,
Was whilom dwelling in a narwe cotage
Beside a grove standing in a dale.
This widewe, which I tell you of my tale,
Sin thilke day that she was last a wif
In patience led a ful simple lif,
For litel was hire catel and hire rente;
By husbandry of swiche as God hire sente
She found hireself and eke hire doughtren two.
Three large sowes had she, and no mo,
Three kine, and eke a sheep that highte Malle;
Ful sooty was hire boure and eke hire halle,
In which she ete many a slender mele;
Of poinant sauce ne knew she never a dele:
No deintee morsel passed thurgh hire throte;
Hire diete was accordant to hire cote:
Repletion ne made hire never sike;
Attempre diete was all hire physike,
And exercise, and hertes suffisance;
The goute let hire nothing for to dance,
Ne apoplexie shente not hire hed:
No win ne dranke she nyther white ne red:
Hire bord was served most with white and black,
Milk and broun bred, in which she fond no lack,

Seinde bacon, and sometime an eye or twey,
For she was as it were a manner dey.
A yerd she had enclosed all about
With stickes, and a drie dicke without,
In which she had a cok highte Chaunteclere,
In all the land of crowing n'as his pere:
His vois was merier than the mery orgon
On masse daies that in the chirches gon:
Wel sikerer was his crowing in his loge
Than is a clok or any abbey orloge:
By nature he knewe eche ascentioun
Of the equinoctial in thilke toun,
For whan degrees fiftene were ascended
Than crew he that it might not ben amended.
His combe was redder than the fin corall,
Enbattelled as it were a castel wall;
His bill was black, and as the jet it shone,
Like asure were his legges and his tone,
His nailes whiter than the lily flour,
And like the burned gold was his colour.
This gentil cok had in his governance
Seven hennes for to don all his plesance,
Which were his susters and his paramoures,
And wonder like to him as of coloures,
Of which the fairest, hewed in the throte,
Was cleped faire Damoselle Pertelote.
Curteis she was, descrete and debonaire,
And compenable, and bare hireself so faire,
Sithen the day that she was sevensight old,

That trewelich she hath the herte in hold
Of Chaunteclere, loken in every lith;
He loved hire so, that wel was him therwith:
But swiche a joye it was to here hem sing,
Whan that the brighte sonne gan to spring,
In swete accord: my lefe is fare in lond.
For thilke time, as I have understand,
Bestes and briddes couden speke and sing.
And so befell that in a dawening
As Chaunteclere among his wives alle
Sate on his perche that was in the halle,
And next him sate his faire Pertelote,
This Chaunteclere gan gronnen in his throte
As man that in his dreme is dretched sore;
And whan that Pertelote thus herd him rore
She was agast, and saide, herte dere,
What aileth you to grone in this manner?
Ye ben a veray sleper, fy for shame.
And he answered and sayde thus; Madame,
I pray you that ye take it not agrefe;
By God me mette I was in swiche mischiefe
Right now, that yet min herte is sore afright.
Now God (quod he) my sweven recche aright,
And kepe my body out of foule prisoun.
My mette how that I romed up and down
Within our yerde, wher as I saw a beste
Was like an hound, and wold han made areste
Upon my body, and han had me ded:
His colour was betwix yelwe and red,

And tipped was his tail and both his eres
With black, unlike the remenant of his heres:
His snout was smal, with glowing eyen twey;
Yet for his loke almost for fere I dey:
This caused me my groning douteles.
Avoy, quod she; fy on you herteles.
Alas! quod she, for by that God above
Now han ye lost myn herte and all my love,
I cannot love a coward by my faith;
For certes, what so any woman saith,
We al desiren, if it mighte be,
To have an husbond hardy, wise, and free,
And secree, and non niggard ne no fool,
Ne him that is agast of every tool,
Ne non avantour by that God above.
How dorsten ye for shame say to your love
That any thing might maken you aferde?
Han ye no mannes herte and han a berde?
Alas! and con ye ben agast of swevenis?
Nothing but vanitee, God wote, in sweven is.
Swevenes engendren of repletions,
And oft of fume, and of complexions,
Whan humours ben to habundant in a wight.
Certes this dreame which ye han met to-night
Cometh of the gret superfluitee
Of youre rede *colera* parde,
Which causeth folk to dreden in her dremes
Of arwes, and of fire with rede lemes,
Of rede bestes that they wol hem bite,

Of conteke, and of waspes gret and lite,
Right as the humour of melancolie
Causeth ful many a man in slepe to crie
For fere of bolles and of beres blake,
Or elles that blake devils wol hem take.
Of other humours coud I telle also,
That werken many a man in slepe moch wo;
But I wol passe as lightly as I can.
Lo Caton, which that was so wise a man,
Said he not thus? Ne do no force of dremes.
Now, Sire, quod she, whan we flee fro the bemes
For Goddes love as take som laxatif:
Up peril of my soule, and of my lif
I counseil you the best, I wol not lie,
That both of coler and of melancolie
Ye purge you; and for ye shul not tarie,
Though in this toun be non apotecarie,
I shal myself two herbes techen you
That shal be for your hele and for your prow,
And in our yerde the herbes shall I finde,
The which han of hir propretee by kinde
To purgen you benethe and eke above.
Sire, forgete not this for Goddes love;
Ye ben ful colerike of complexion;
Ware that the sonne in his ascention
Ne finde you not replete of humours hote;
And if it do, I dare wel lay a grote
That ye shul han a fever tertiane,
Or elles an ague, that may be your bane.

A day or two ye shul han digestives
Of wormes or ye take your laxatives,
Of laureole, centaurie, and fumetere,
Or elles of ellebor that groweth there,
Of catapuce or of gaitre beries,
Or herbe ive growing in our yerd that mery is;
Picke hem right as they grow, and ete hem in.
Beth mery, husbond; for your fader kin
Dredeth no dreme: I can say you no more.
Madame, quod he, *grand mercy* of your lore;
But natheles as touching Dan Caton,
That hath of wisdome swiche a gret renoun,
Though that he bade no dremes for to drede,
By God, men moun in olde bookes rede
Of many a man more of auctoritee
Than ever Caton was, so mote I the,
That all the revers sayn of his sentence,
And han wel founden by experience,
That dremes ben significations
As wel of joye as tribulations
That folk enduren in this lif present:
Ther nedeth make of this non argument;
The veray preve sheweth it indede.
On of the grettest auctours that men rede
Saith thus, that whilom twey felawes wente
On pilgrimage in a ful good entente,
And happed so they came into a toun
Wher ther was swiche a congregatioun
Of peple, and eke so streit of herbergage,

That they ne founde as moche as a cotage
In which they bothe might ylogged be,
Wherefore they musten of necessitee;
As for that night, departen compaignie;
And eche of hem goth to his hostelrie,
And toke his logging as it wolde falle.
That on of hem was logged in a stalle,
Fer in a yard, with oxen of the plough,
That other man was logged wel ynough,
As was his aventure or his fortune,
That us governeth all, as in commune.
And so befell that long or it were day
This man met in his bed, ther as he lay,
How that his felaw gan upon him calle,
And said, Alas! for in an oxen stalle
This night shal I be mordred ther I lie;
Now help me, dere brother! or I die:
In alle haste come to me, he saide.
This man out of his slepe for fere abraide;
But whan that he was waken of his slepe
He turned him, and toke of this no kepe;
Him thought his dreame was but a vanitee.
Thus twies in his sleping dremed he.
And at the thridde time yet his felaw
Came, as him thought, and said, I now am slaw;
Behold my bloody woundes depe and wide:
Arise up erly in the morwe tide,
And at the west gate of the toun (quod he)
A carte ful of donge ther shalt thou see,

In which my body is hid prively;
Do thilke carte arresten boldely.
My gold caused my mordre, soth to sain;
And told him every point how he was slain
With a ful pitous face, pale of hewe.
And trusteth wel his dreame he found ful trewe.
For on the morwe sone as it was day
To his felawes inne he toke his way,
And whan that he came to this oxes stalle
After his felaw he began to calle.
The hosteler answered him anon,
And saide, Sire, your felaw is agon;
As sone as day he went out of the toun.
This man gan fallen in suspecioun,
Remembring on his dremes that he mette,
And forth he goth, no lenger wold he lette,
Unto the west gate of the toun, and fond
A dong carte as it went for to dong lond,
That was arraied in the same wise
As ye han herde the dede man devise;
And with an hardy herte he gan to crie
Vengeance and justice of this felonie;
My felaw mordred is this same night,
And in this carte he lith gaping upright.
I crie out on the ministres, quod he,
That shulden kepe and reulen this citee:
Harow! alas! here lith my felaw slain.
What shuld I more unto this tale sain?
The peple out stert, and cast the cart to ground,

And in the middle of the dong they found
The dede man that mordred was all newe.
O blisful God! that art so good and trewe,
Lo, how that thou bewreyest mordre alway!
Mordre wol out, that see we day by day:
Mordre is so wlatson and abhominable
To God, that is so just and resonable,
That he ne wol not suffre it hylled be:
Though it abide a yere, or two or three,
Mordre wol out; this is my conclusioun.
And right anon the ministres of the toun
Han hent the carter, and so sore him pined,
And eke the hosteler so sore engined,
That they beknewe hir wickednesse anon,
And were anhangid by the necke bon.
Here moun ye see that dremes ben to drede.
And certes in the same book I rede,
Right in the next chapitre after this,
(I gabbe not, so have I joye and blis)
Two men that wold han passed over the see,
For certain cause, in to a fer contree,
If that the winde ne hadde ben contrarie,
That made hem in a citee for to tarie
That stood ful mery upon a haven side:
But on a day, agein the even tide,
The wind gan change, and blew right as hem lest:
Jolif and glad they wenten to hir rest,
And casten hem ful erly for to saile;
But to that o man fel a gret mervaile.

That on of hem in sleping as he lay
He mette a wondre dreame again the day:
Him thought a man stood by his beddes side,
And him commanded that he shuld abide,
And said him thus; If thou to-morwe wende
Thou shalt be dreint; my tale is at an ende.
He woke, and told his felaw what he met,
And praied him his viage for to let;
As for that day he prayd him for to abide.
His felaw, that lay by his beddes side,
Gan for to laugh, and scorned him ful faste:
No dreame, quod he, may so my herte agaste
That I wol leten for to do my thinges:
I sette not a straw by thy dreminges,
For swevens ben but vanitees and japes:
Men dreame al day of oules and of apes,
And eke of many a mase therwithal;
Men dreame of thing that never was ne shal.
But sith I see that thou wol there abide,
And thus forslouthen wilfully thy tide,
God wot it reweth me; and have good day:
And thus he took his leve, and went his way.
But or that he had half his cours ysailed,
N'ot I not why, ne what mischance it ailed,
But casuelly the shippes bottom rente,
And ship and man under the water wente
In sight of other shippes ther beside
That with him sailed at the same tide.
And therefore, faire Pertelote so dere,

By swiche ensamples olde maist thou lere
That no man shulde be to reccheles
Of dremes, for I say thee douteles
That many a dreme ful sore is for to drede.
Lo, in the lif of Seint Kenelme I rede,
That was Kenulphus sone, the noble King
Of Mercenrike, how Kenelm mette a thing.
A litel or he were mordered on a day
His mordre in his avision he say;
His norice him expounded every del
His sweven, and bade him for to kepe him wel
Fro treson; but he n'as but seven yere old,
And therefore litel tale hath he told
Of any dreme, so holy was his herte.
By God I hadde lever than my sherte
That ye had red his legend as have I.
Dame Pertelote, I say you trewely,
Macrobius, that writ the avision
In Affrike of the worthy Scipion,
Affirmeth dremes, and sayth that they ben
Warning of thinges that men after seen.
And forthermore, I pray you loketh wel
In The Olde Testament of Daniel,
If he held dremes any vanitee.
Rede eke of Joseph, and ther shuln ye see
Wher dremes ben somtime (I say not alle)
Warning of thinges that shuln after falle.
Loke of Egipt the king, Dan Pharao,
His baker and his boteler also,

Wheder they ne felten non effect in dremes.
Who so wol seken actes of sondry remes
May rede of dremes many a wonder thing.
Lo Cresus, which that was of Lydie king,
Mette he not that he sat upon a tree?
Which signified he shuld anhangd be.
Lo hire Adromacha, Hectores wif,
That day that Hector shulde lese his lif,
She dremed on the same nighte beforne
How that the lif of Hector shuld be lorne
If thilke day he went into bataille;
She warned him, but it might not availle;
He went forth for to fighten natheles,
And was yslain anon of Achilles.
But thilke tale is al to long to telle,
And eke it is nigh day, I may not dwelle.
Shortly I say, as for conclusion,
That I shal han of this avision
Adversitee; and I say forthermore,
That I ne tell of laxatives no store,
For they ben venomous, I wot it wel:
I hem deffie; I love hem never a del.
But let us speke of mirthe, and stinte all this.
Madame Pertelote, so have I blis,
Of o thing God hath sent me large grace,
For whan I see the beautee of your face,
Ye ben so scarlet red about your eyen,
It maketh all my drede for to dien;
For al so siker as *In principio*

Mulier est hominis confusio.

(Madame, the sentence of this Latine is,
Woman is mannes joye and mannes blis;) For whan I fele a-night your softe side,
Al be it that I may not on you ride
For that our perche is made so narwe, alas!
I am so ful of joye and of solas
That I deffie bothe sweven and dreme.
And with that word he flew down fro the beme,
For it was day, and eke his hennes alle,
And with a chuk he gan hem for to calle,
For he had found a corn lay in the yerd.
Real he was, he was no more aferd;
He fethered Pertelote twenty time,
And trade hire eke as oft, er it was prime:
He loketh as it were a grim leoun,
And on his toos he rometh up and doun;
Him deigned not to set his feet to ground:
He chukketh, whan he hath a corn yfound,
And to him rennen than his wives alle.
Thus real, as a prince is in his halle,
Leve I this Chaunteclere in his pasture;
And after wol I till his aventure.
Whan that the month in which the world began,
That highte March, whan God first maked man,
Was complete, and ypassed were also,
Sithen March ended thritty dayes and two,
Befell that Chaunteclere in all his pride,
His seven wives walking him beside,

Cast up his eye to the brighte sonne,
That in the signe of Taurus hadde yronne
Twenty degrees and on, and somewhat more:
He knew by kind, and by non other lore,
That it was prime, and crew with blisful steven.
The sonne, he said, is clomben up on heven
Twenty degrees and on, and more ywis;
Madame Pertelote, my worldes blis,
Herkeneth these blisful briddes how they sing,
And see the freshe floures how they spring;
Ful is min herte of revel, and solas.
But sodenly him fell a sorweful cas,
For ever the latter ende of joye is wo;
God wote that worldly joye is sone ago;
And if a rethor coude faire endite
He in a chronicle might it saufly write
As for a souveraine notabilitee.
Now every wise man let him herken me:
This story is also trewe, I undertake,
As is the book of Launcelot du Lake,
That women holde in ful gret reverence.
Now wol I turne agen to my sentence.
A col fox, ful of sleigh iniquitee,
That in the grove had wonned yeres three,
By high imagination forecast,
The same night thurghout the hegges brast
Into the yerd ther Chaunteclere the faire
Was wont, and eke his wives, to repaire,
And in a bedde of wortes stille he lay

Till it was passed undern of the day,
Waiting his time on Chaunteclere to falle,
As gladly don thise homicides alle
That in await liggem to mordre men.
O false morderour! rucking in thy den,
O newe Scariot, newe Genelon!
O false dissimulour, o Greek Sinon!
That broughtest Troye al utterly to sorwe,
O Chaunteclere! accursed be the morwe,
That thou into thy yerd flew fro the bemes;
Thou were ful wel ywarned by thy dremes
That thilke day was perilous to thee:
But what that God forewote most nedes be,
After the opinion of certain clerkes,
Witnesse on him that any parfit clerk is,
That in scole is gret altercation
In this matere and gret disputison,
And hath ben of an hundred thousand men:
But I ne cannot boult it to the bren,
As can the holy Doctour Augustin,
Or Boece, or the bishop Bradwardin,
Whether that Goddes worthy foreweting
Streineth me nedely for to don a thing,
(Nedely clepe I simple necessitee)
Or elles if free chois be granted me
To do that same thing, or do it nought,
Though God forewot it, or that it was wrought;
Or if his weting streineth never a del
But by necessitee condicionel.

I wol not han to don of swiche matere;
My Tale is of a cok, as ye may here,
That took his conseil of his wif and sorwe
To walken in the yerd upon the morwe
That he had met the dreme, as I you told.
Womennes conseiles ben ful often cold;
Womennes conseil brought us first to wo,
And made Adam fro Paradis to go,
Ther as he was ful mery and wel at ese:
But for I n'ot to whom I might displese
If I conseil of women wolde blame,
Passe over, for I said it in my game.
Rede auctours where they trete of swiche matere,
And what they sayn of women ye mown here.
This ben the Cokkes wordes and not mine;
I can non harme of no woman devine.
Faire in the sond, to bath hire merily,
Lith Pertelote, and all hire susters by,
Agein the sonne, and Chaunteclere so free
Sang merrier than the mermaid in the see,
For Phisiologus sayth sikerly
How that they singen wel and merily.
And so befell that as he cast his eye
Among the wortes on a boterflie
He was ware of this fox that lay ful low:
Nothing ne list him thaune for to crow,
But cried anon Cok, cok, and up he sterte
As man that was affraied in his herte;
For naturally a beest desireth flee

Fro his contrarie if he may it see,
Though he never erst had seen it with his eye.
This Chaunteclere, whan he gan him espie,
He wold han fled, but that the fox anon
Said, Gentil Sire, alas! what wol ye don?
Be ye affraid of me that am your frend?
Now certes I were werse than any fend
If I to you wold harme or vilanie.
I n'am not come your conseil to espie,
But trewely the cause of my coming
Was only for to herken how ye sing.
For trewely ye han as mery a steven
As any angel hath that is in heven,
Therwith ye han of musike more feling
Than had Boece, or any that can sing.
My Lord, your fader (God his soule blesse)
And eke your moder of hire gentillesse
Han in myn hous yben, to my gret ese,
And certes, Sire, ful fain wold I you plese.
But for men speke of singen, I wol sey,
So mote I brouken wel min eyen twey,
Save you, ne herd I never man so sing
As did your fader in the morwening:
Certes it was of herte all that he song.
And for to make his vois the more strong
He wold so peine him, that with both his eyen
He muste winke, so loude he walde crien,
And stonden on his tiptoon therwithal,
And stretchen forth his necke long and smal.

And eke he was of swiche discretion,
That ther n'as no man in no region
That him in song or wisdom mighte passe.
I have wel red in Dan Burnel the asse
Among his vers, how that ther was a cok
That for a preestes sone yave him a knock
Upon his leg, while he was yonge and nice,
He made him for to lese his benefice;
But certain ther is no comparison
Betwixt the wisdom and discretion
Of your fader and his subtilitee.
Now singeth, Sire, for Seint Charitee:
Let see, can ye your fader countrefete?
This Chaunteclere his winges gan to bete,
As man that coud not his treson espie,
So was he ravished with his flaterie.
Alas! ye lordes, many a false flatour
Is in your court, and many a losengeour,
That pleseth you wel more, by my faith,
Than he that sothfastnesse unto you saith,
Redeth Ecclesiast of flaterie:
Beth ware, ye lordes, of hire trecherie.
This Chaunteclere stood high upon his toos
Streching his necke, and held his eyen cloos
And gan to crowen loude for the nones;
And Dan Russel the fox stert up at ones,
And by the gargat hente Chaunteclere,
And on his back toward the wood him bere,
For yet ne was ther no man that him sued.

O destinee! that maist not ben eschued,
Alas that Chaunteclere flew fro the bemes!
Alas, his wif ne raughte not of dremes!
And on a Friday fell all this meschance.
O Venus! that art goddesse of Plesance,
Sin that thy servant was this Chaunteclere,
And in thy service did all his powere,
More for delit, than world to multiplie,
Why wolt thou suffre him on thy day to die?
O Gaufride, dere maister souverain!
That whan thy worthy King Richard was slain
With shot, complainedst his deth so sore,
Why ne had I now thy science and thy lore,
The Friday for to chiden as did ye?
(For on a Friday sothly slain was he)
Then wold I shew you how that I coud plaine
For Chauntecleres drede and for his paine.
Certes swiche cry ne lamentation
N'as never of ladies made whan Ilion
Was wonne, and Pirrus with his streite swerd,
When he had hent King Priam by the berd,
And slain him, (as saith us *Eneidus*)
As maden all the hennes in the cloos
Whan they had seen of Chaunteclere the sight;
But souverainly Dame Pertelote shrigh
Ful louder than did Hasdruballes wif,
Whan that hire husbond hadde ylost his lif,
And that the Romaines hadden brent Cartage;
She was so ful of turment and of rage

That wilfully into the fire she sterte,
And brent hire selven with a stedfast herte.
O woful hennes! right so criden ye,
As whan that Nero brente the citee
Of Rome, cried the Senatoures wives,
For that hir husbandes losten alle hir lives.
Withouten gilt this Nero hath hem slain.
Now wol I turne unto my tale again.
The sely widewe and hire doughtren two,
Harden these hennes crie and maken wo,
And out at the dores sterten they anon,
And saw the fox toward the wode is gon,
And bare upon his back the cok away:
They crieden out, Harow! and wala wa!
A ha the fox! and after him they ran,
And eke with staves many an other man;
Ran Colle our dogge, and Talbot and Gerlond,
And Malkin, with hire distaf in hire hond;
Ran cow and calf; and eke the veray hogges
So fered were for barking of the dogges,
And shouting of the men and women eke,
They ronnen so, hem thought hir hertes breke;
They yelleden as fendes don in helle;
The dokes crieden as men wold hem quelle:
The gees for fere flewen over the trees,
Out of the hive came the swarme of bees,
So hidous was the noise, a *benedicite!*
Certes he Jakke Straw and his meinie,
Ne maden never shoutes half so shrille,

Whan that they wolden any Fleming kille,
As thilke day was made upon the fox.
Of bras they broughten beemes and of box,
Of horn and bone, in which they blew and pouped,
And therwithal they shriked and they houped;
It semed as that the heven shulde falle.
Now, goode men, I pray you herkeneth alle:
Lo how Fortune turneth sodenly
The hope and pride eke of hire enemy.
This cok that lay upon the foxes bake,
In all his drede unto the fox he spake,
And sayde; Sire, if that I were as ye
Yet wold I sayn, (as wisly God helpe me)
Turneth agein, ye proude cherles alle,
A veray pestilence upon you falle:
Now I am come unto the wodes side,
Maugre your hed, the cok shal here abide;
I wol him ete in faith, and that anon.
The fox answered, in faith it shal be don;
And as he spake the word, al sodenly
The cok brake from his mouth deliverly,
And high upon a tree he flew anon.
And whan the fox saw that the cok was gon,
Alas! quod he, o Chaunteclere, alas!
I have (quod he) ydon to you trespas,
In as moche as I maked you aferd,
Whan I you hente and brought out of your yerd;
But, Sire, I did it in no wikke entente:
Come down, and I shal tell you what I mente:

I shall say sothe to you, God help me so.
Nay than, quod he, I shrewe us bothe two;
And first I shrewe myself bothe blood and bones
If thou begile me oftener than ones:
Thou shalt no more thurgh thy flaterie
Do me to sing and winken with myn eye,
For he that winketh whan he shulde see,
Al wilfully, God let him never the.
Nay, quod the fox, but God yeve him meschance,
That is so indiscrete of governance,
That jangleth whan that he shuld hold his pees.
Lo, which it is for to be reccheles
And negligent, and trust on flaterie.
But ye that holden this Tale a folie,
As of a fox, or of a cok or hen,
Taketh the moralitee therof, good men;
For Seint Poule sayth, that all that writen is,
To our doctrine it is ywriten ywis.
Taketh the fruit, and let the chaf be stille.
Now, goode God, if that it be thy wille,
As sayth my Lord, so make us all good men,
And bring us to thy high blisse. *Amen.*
Sire Nonnes Preest, our Hoste sayd anon,
Yblessed be thy breche and every ston;
This was a mery tale of Chaunteclere:
But by my trouthe if thou were seculere,
Thou woldest ben a tredefoule a right:
For if thou have courage as thou hast might
Thee were nede of hennes, as I wene,

Ye mo than seven times seventene.
Se whiche braunes hath this gentil Preest,
So gret a necke and swiche a large breest!
He loketh as a sparhawk with his eyen:
Him nedeth not his colour for to dien
With Brasil, ne with grain of Portingale.
But, Sire, faire falle you for your tale.
And after that he with ful mery chere
Sayd to another, as ye shulen here.

THE FLOUR AND THE LEFE

THE ARGUMENT

A gentlewoman out of an arbour in a grove seeth a great company of knights and ladies in a dance upon the green grass; the which being ended, they all kneel down and do honour to the daisie, some to the Flower, and some to the Leaf. Afterward this gentlewoman learneth, by one of these ladies, the meaning hereof, which is this: They which honour the Flower, a thing fading with every blast, are such as look after beauty and worldly pleasure; but they that honour the Leaf, which abideth with the root, notwithstanding the frosts and winter storms, are they which follow virtue and during qualities, without regard of worldly respects.

When that Phœbus his chair of gold so hie
Had whirlid up the sterrie sky aloft,
And in the Bole was entrid certainly,
When shouris sote of rain descendid soft,
Causing the ground felè timis and oft
Up for to give many an wholesome air,
And every plain was yclothid faire:
With newè grene, and makith smalè flours

To springin here and there in field and mede,
So very gode and wholesome be the shours,
That they renewn that was old and dede
In winter time, and out of every sede
Springith the herbè, so that every wight
Of this seson wexith richt glade and licht.
And I so gladè of the seson swete,
Was happid thus; upon a certain night
As I lay in my bed slepe full unmete
Was unto me, but why that I ne might
Rest I ne wist, for there n'as erthly wight
[As I suppose] had more of hertis ese
Than I, for I n'ad sicknesse nor disese:
Wherefore I mervaile gretly of my self
That I so long withoutin slepè lay,
And up I rose thre houris aftir twelwe,
About the springing of the gladsome day,
And on I put my gear and mine aray,
And to a plesaunt grove I gan to pas
Long or the bright sonne uprisin was;
In which were okis grete, streight as a line,
Undir the which the grass so freshe of hewe
Was newly sprong, and an eight fote or nine
Every tre well fro his fellow grew,
With braunchis brode laden with levis new,
That sprongin out agen the sonne shene:
Some very rede, and some a glad light grene:
Which [as me thought] was a right plesaunt sight;
And eke the birdis songis for to here

Would have rejoisid any erthly wight,
And I, that couth not yet in no manere
Herein the nightingale of all the yere,
Full busily herk'nid with hert and ere
If I her voice perceve could any where:
And at the last a path of litil brede
I found, that gretly had not usid be,
For it forgrowin was with grass and wede,
That well unnethis a wight might it se;
Thought I, this path some whider doth parde;
And so I followid till it me brought
To a right plesant herbir wel ywrought,
Which that benchid was, and with turfis new
Freshly turvid, whereof the grene grass
So small, so thick, so short, so fresh of hewe,
That most like to grene woll wot I it was;
The hegge also, that yedin in compas,
And closid in allè the grene herbere,
With sycamor was set and eglatere.
Within, in fere so well and cunningly,
That every braunch and lefe grew by mesure
Plain as a bord, of an height by and by,
I se nevir a thing [I you ensure]
So well ydone, for he that toke the cure
It for to make [I trowe] did all his peine
To mak it pas al tho that men have seine.
And shapin was this herber rofe and al
As is a pretty parlour, and also
The hegge as thick as is a castil wall,

That who that list without to stonde or go,
Thogh he wold al day prayin to and fro,
He should not se if there were any wight
Within or no, but one within well might —
Perceve all tho that ydin there without
Into the field, that was on every side
Coverd with corn and grass, that out of doubt
Tho one would sekin all the worlde wide
So rich a felde could not be espyde
Upon no cost, as of the quantity,
For of allè gode thing there was plenty.
And I, that al these plesaunt sightis se,
Thought suddainly I felt so swete an air
Of the eglaterè, that certainly
There is no hert [I deme] in such dispair,
Ne yet with thoughtis froward and contraire
So overlaid, but it should sone have bote
If it had onis felt this savour sote.
And as I stode and cast aside mine eye
I was ware of the fairist medler tre
That evir yet in all my life I se,
As full of blossomis as it might be,
Therein a goldfinch leping pretily
From bough to bough, and as him list he ete
Here and there of buddis and flouris swete.
And to the herbir side was adjoyning
This fairist tre of which I have you told,
And at the last the bird began to sing
[Whan he had etin what he etin would]

So passing swetely that by many fold
It was more plesaunt than I couth devise;
And whan his song was endid in this wise,
The nightingale with so mery a note
Answerid him, that alle the wode yrong
So sodainly, that as it were a sote
I stode astonied, and was with the song
Thorow ravishid, that till late and long
I ne wist in what place I was ne where,
Ayen methought she song e'en by mine ere:
Wherefore I waited about busily
On every side if I her might se,
And at the last I gan full well espie
Where she sate in a fresh grene laury tre,
On the further side evin right by me,
That gave so passing a delicious smell,
According to the eglantere full well;
Whereof I had so inly grete plesure,
As methought I surely ravished was
Into Paradise, wherein my desire
Was for to be, and no ferthir to pas
As for that day, and on the sotè grass
I sat me down, for as for mine entent
The birdis song was more convenient,
And more plesaunt to me by many fold
Than mete or drink, or any othir thing,
Thereto the herbir was so fresh and cold,
The wholsome savours eke so comforting,
That [as I demid] sith the beginning

Of the worldè was nevir seen er than
So plesaunt a ground of none erthly man.
And as I sat the birdis herkening thus,
Methought that I herd voicis suddainly,
The most swetist and most delicious
That evir any wight I trow trewly
Herdin in hir life, for the armony
And swete accord was in so gode musike
That the voicis to angels most were like.
At the last out of a grove evin by
[That was right godely and plesaunt to sight]
I se where there came singing lustily
A world of ladies, but to tell aright
Ther beauty grete lyith not in my might,
Ne ther array; nevirthèless I shall
Tell you a pert, tho' I speke not of all:
The surcots white of velvet well fitting
They werin clad, and the semis eche one,
As it werin a mannir garnishing,
Was set with emeraudis one and one
By and by, but many a richè stone
Was set on the purfilis out of dout
Of collours, sleeves, and trainis, round about;
As of grete perlis round and orient,
And diamondis fine and rubys red,
And many othir stone of which I went
The namis now; and everich on her hede
A rich fret of gold, which withoutin drede
Was full of statèly rich stonys set,

And evrey lady had a chapelet,
On ther hedis of braunchis fresh and grene,
So wele ywrought, and so marvelously,
That it was a right noble sight to sene,
Some of laurir, and some full plesauntly
Had chapèlets of wodebind, and sadly
Some of agnus castus werin also,
Chaplets fresh; but there were many of tho,
That dauncid and eke song full sobirly,
But all they yede in maner of compace;
But one there yede in mid the company
Sole by herself; but all follow'd the pace
That she kept, whose hevinly figured face
So plesaunt was, and her wele shape person,
That of beauty she past them everichone,
And more richly beseen by manyfold
She was also in every manir thing;
Upon her hede full plesaunt to behold
A coron of gold rich for any king,
A braunch of agnus castus eke bering
In her hand, and to my sight trewily
She lady was of all the compaignie;
And she began a roundell lustily
That *Sus le foyle de vert moy men call*
Sine & mon joly cœur est endormy,
And than the company answerid all,
With voicis swete entunid and so small,
That methought it the swetest melody
That evir I herd in my lyf sothly.

And thus they all came dauncing and singing
Into the middis of the mede echone,
Before the herbir where I was sitting,
And God wot I thought I was well bigone,
For than I might avise them one by one
Who fairist was, who best could dance or sing,
Or who most womanly was in all thing.
They had not dauncid but a little throw
When that I herd not fer of sodainly
So grete a noise of thundering trumpis blow
As though it should have departid the skie,
And aftir that within a while I sie
From the same grove where the ladies came out
Of men of armis coming such a rout,
As all men on erth had ben assemblid,
On that place well horsid for the nonis,
Stering so fast that all the erth tremblid;
But for to speke of richis and stonis,
And men and horse, I trow the large wonis
Of Pretir John, ne all his tresory,
Might not unneth have bought the tenth party.
Of their array whoso list to here more,
I shall reherse so as I can a lite,
Out of the grove that I speke of before
I se come first, all in their clokis white,
A company that wore for ther delite
Chapèlets fresh of okis serial
But newly sprong, and trumpets were they all;
On every trump hanging a brode bannere

Of fine tartarium, full richly bete,
Every trumpet his lord'is armis bere
About ther nekkis, with grete perlis sete,
Collaris brode, for cost they wou'd not lete,
As it would seem, for ther scochons echone
Were set about with many a precious stone;
Ther horsis harneis was all white also;
And aftir them next in one company
Camin kingis at armis and no mo,
In clokis of white cloth with gold richly,
Chaplets of grene on ther heds on hye,
The crownis that they on ther scotchons bere
Were set with perl, and ruby, and saphere,
And eke grete diamondis many one;
But all ther horsis harneis and other gere
Was in a sute according everichone,
As ye have herd the foresaid trumpets were,
And by seming they were nothing to lere,
And ther guiding they did so manirly;
And aftir them came a gret company
Of heraudeis and pursevauntis eke,
Arrayid in clothis of white velvet,
And hardily they were nothing to seke
How they on them shouldin the harneis set,
And every man had on a chapèlet,
Scotchonis and eke horse harneis in dede
They had in sute of them that 'fore them yede.
Next after these appere in armour bright,
All save ther hedis, semely knightis nine,

And every clasp and nail, as to my sight,
Of ther harneis were of red gold so fine,
With cloth of gold, and furrid with ermine,
Were the tappouris of their stedis strong,
Both wide and large, that to the ground did hong;
And every boss of bridle and paitrel
That they had on was worth, as I would wene,
A thousand pound; and on ther hedis well
Dressid were crounis of the laurir grene,
The best ymade that evir I had sene;
And every knight had aftir him riding
Thre henchmen, still upon him awaiting;
Of which every (first) on a short trunchon
His lord'is helmet bore so richly dight
That the worst of them was worth the ransoume
Of any king; the second a shield bright
Bare at his back; the thred barin upright
A mighty spere, full sharp yground and kene,
And every child ware of levis grene
A fresh chap'let upon his hairis bright;
And clokis white of fine velvet they were;
Ther stedis trappid and arayid right,
Without difference as ther lordis were;
And aftir them on many a fresh coursere
There came of armid knightis such a rout
That they besprad the large field about;
And all they werin, aftir ther degrees,
Chappèlets new, or made of laurir grene,
Or some of oke, or some of othir trees,

Some in ther hondis barin boughis shene,
Some of laurir, and some of okis bene,
Some of hawthorne, and some of the wodebind,
And many mo which I have not in mind.
And so they came ther horse freshly stirring
With bloody sownis of ther trompis loud;
There se I many an uncouth disguising
In the array of thilkè knightis proud;
And at the last as evenly as they coud
They toke ther place in middis of the mede,
And every knight turnid his horsis hede
To his felow, and lightly laid a spere
Into the rest, and so justis began
On every part aboutin here and there;
Some brake his spere, some threw down horse and man,
About the felde astray the stedis ran;
And to behold their rule and govirnance
I you ensure it was a grete plesaunce.
And so the justis last an hour and more
But tho that crownid were in laurir grene
Did win the prise; their dintis were so sore
That there was none agenst them might sustene,
And the justing allè was left off clene;
And fro ther horse the nine alight anon,
And so did all the remnaunt everichone;
And forth they yede togidir twain and twain,
That to behold it was a worthy sight,
Toward the ladies on the grenè plain,
That song and dauncid, as I said now right;

The ladies as sone as they godely might
They brakyn off both the song and the dance
And yede to mete them with full glad semblaunce:
And every lady toke full womanly
By the hond a knight, and so forth they yede
Unto a faire laurir that stode fast by,
With levis laid, the boughis of grete brede,
And to my dome ther nevir was indede
A man that had sene half so faire a tre,
For undirneith it there might well have be
An hundrid persons at ther own plesaunce
Shadowid fro the hete of Phœbus bright,
So that they shouldin have felt no grevance
Neithir for rain, ne haile, that them hurt might;
The savour eke rejoice would any wight
That hed be sick or melancholious,
It was so very gode and vertuous.
And with grete rev'rence they enclinid low
Unto the tre so sote and fair of hew,
And aftir that within a litil throw
They all began to sing and daunce of new;
Some song of love, some plaining of untrew,
Environing the tre that stode upright,
And evir yede a lady and a knight.
And at the last I cast mine eie aside,
And was ware of a lusty company
That came roming out of the feldè wide,
And hond in hond a knight and a lady,
The ladies all in surcotes, that richly

Purfilid were with many a rich stone,
And every knight of grene ware mantlis on,
Embroulid wele, so as the surcots were,
And everich had a chapelet on her hed,
[Which did right wele upon the shining here]
Makid of godely flouris white and red,
The knightis eke that they in hondè led
In sute of them ware chaplets everichone,
And before them went minstrels many one;
As harpis, pipis, lutis, and sautry,
Allè in grene, and on ther hedis bare
Of diverse flouris made ful craftily,
Al in a sute, godely chaplets they ware,
And so dauncing into the mede they fare,
In mid the which they found a tuft that was
Al ovirsprad with flouris in compas:
Whereto they enclined evèrichone
With grete revèrence, and that full humbly;
And at the last there tho began anon
A lady for to sing right womanly
A bargaret in praising the daisie,
For (as methought) among her notis swete
She said *Si douce est la Margarete!*
Then they allè answerid her in fere
So passingly well and so plesauntly,
That it was a most blisfull noise to here;
But I 'not how it happid, sodainly
As about none the sonne so fervently
Waxe hotè that the pretty tendir floures

Had lost the beauty of their fresh collours.
For shronke with hete the ladies eke to brent,
That they ne wist where they them might bestow,
The knightis swelt, for lack of shade nie shent,
And aftir that within a litil throw
The wind began so sturdily to blow
That down goth all the flowris everichone,
So that in all the mede there laft not one,
Save such as succoured were among the leves
Fro every storme that mightè them assaile,
Growing undir the heggis and thick greves;
And aftir that there came a storme of haile
And rain in fere, so that withoutin faile
The ladies ne the knightis n'ade o' thred
Dry on them, so drooping wet was ther wede.
And when the storme was clene passid away
Tho in the white, that stode undir the tre,
They felt nothing of all the grete affray
That they in grene without had in ybe;
To them they yede for routh and for pite,
Them to comfort aftir their grete disese,
So fain they were the helplesse for to ese.
Than I was ware how one of them in grene
Had on a coron rich and well-fitting,
Wherefore I demid well she was a quene,
And tho in grene on her were awaiting;
The ladies then in white that were coming
Towardis them, and the knightis in fere,
Began to comfort them and make them chere.

The quene in white, that was of grete beauty,
Toke by the honde the quene that was in grene,
And seidè, Sustir, I have grete pity
Of your annoy and of your troublous tene
Wherein ye and your company have bene
So long, alas! and if that if you plesè
To go with me I shall do you the ese
In al the plesure that I can or may;
Whereof that othir, humbly as she might,
Thankid her, for in right evil array
She was with storme and hete I you behight;
And evèry lady then anon right
That were in white one of them toke in grene
By the hond, which when the knightis had sene
In like manir eche of them toke a knight
Clad in the grene, and forth with them they fare
To an heggè, where that they anon right
To makin these justis they would not spare
Boughis to hew down, and eke trees to square,
Wherewith they made them stately firis grete
To dry ther clothis, that were wringing wete:
And aftir that of herbis that there grew
They made for blistirs of the sonne brenning
Ointmentis very gode, wholsome and new,
Where that they yede the sick fast anointing;
And after that they yede about gadring
Plesant saladis, which they made them ete
For to refreshe ther grete unkindly hete.
The lady of the Lefè then gan to pray

Her of the Floare [for so to my seming
They should be callid as by ther array]
To soupe with her, and eke for any thing
That she should with her all her pepill bringe,
And she ayen in right godely manere
Thankith her fast of her most frendly chere,
Saying plainely that she would obay
With all her hert all her commandement;
And then anon without lengir delay
The lady of the Lefe hath one ysent
To bring a palfray aftir her intent,
Arrayid wele in fair harneis of gold,
For nothing lackid that to him long shold.
And aftir that to all her company
She made to purvey horse and every thing
That they nedid, and then full hastily
Even by the herbir where I was sitting
They passid all, so merrily singing
That it would have comfortid any wight:
But then I se a passing wondir sight,
For then the nightingale, that all the day
Had in the laurir sete, and did her might
The whole service to sing longing to May,
All sodainly began to take her flight,
And to the lady of the Lefe forthright
She flew, and set her on her hand softly,
Which was a thing I mervailed at gretly.
The goldfinch eke, that fro the medlar tre
Was fled for hete unto the bushis cold,

Unto the lady of the Flowre gan fle,
And on her hond he set him as he wold,
And plesauntly his wingis gan to fold,
And for to sing they peine them both as sore
As they had do of all the day before.
And so these ladies rode forth a grete pace,
And all the rout of knightis eke in fere;
And I that had sene all this wondir case
Thought that I would assay in some manere
To know fully the trowth of this mattere,
And what they were that rode so plesauntly:
And when they were the herbir passid by
I drest me forth, and happid mete anon
A right fair lady, I do you ensure,
And she came riding by her self alone,
Allè in white, with semblaunce full demure;
I her salued, bad her gode avinture
Mote her befall, as I coud most humbly,
And she answered, My doughtir, gramercy!
Madame, quod I, if that I durst enquire
Of you, I wold fain of that company
Wit what they be that passed by this herbere.
And she ayen answerid right frendly,
My doughtir, all tho that passid hereby
In white clothing be servants everichone
Unto the Lefe, and I my self am one.
See ye not her that crownid is (quod she)
Allè in white? Madame, then quod I, Yes.
That is Dian, goddess of Chastity,

And for bicause that she a maidin is
Into her hond the brance she berith this
That agnus castus men call propirly;
And all the ladies in her company
Which ye se of that herbè chaplets were
Be such as han alwey kept maidinhede,
And all they that of laurir chaplets bere,
Be such as hardy were in manly dede
Victorious, name which nevir may be dede,
And all they were so worthy of their honde
In their time that no one might them withstonde;
And tho that were chapèlets on ther hede
Of fresh wodebind be such as nevir were
To Love untrue in word, in thought, ne dede,
But ay stedfast, ne for plesance ne fere,
Tho that they shulde ther hertis all to tere,
Woud never flit, but evir were stedfast
Till that ther livis there assundir brast.
Now, fair Madame! quod I, yet would I pray
Your ladiship [if that it mightin be]
That I might knowe by some manir of wey,
Sithin that it hath likid your beaute
The trouth of these ladies for to tell me,
What that these knightis be in rich armour,
And what tho be in grene and were the Flour,
And why that some did rev'rence to the tre,
And some unto the plot of flouris fair?
With right gode wil, my doughtir fair! quod she,
Sith your desire is gode and debonaire:

The nine crownid be very exemplaire
Of all honour longing to chivalry,
And those certain be cleft, The Nine Worthy,
Which that ye may se riding all before,
That in ther time did many a noble dede,
And for ther worthiness full oft have bore
The crown of laurir levis on ther hede,
As ye may in your oldè bokis rede,
And how that he that was a conqueror
Had by laurir alwey his most honour:
And tho that barin bowes in ther hond
Of the precious laurir so notable,
Be such as were [I woll ye undirstend]
Most noble Knightis of The Round Table,
And eke the Douseperis honourable,
Which they bere in the sign of victory,
As witness of ther dedis mightily:
Eke ther be Knightis old of the Gartir,
That in ther timis did right worthily,
And the honour they did to the laurir
Is for by it they have ther laud wholly,
Ther triumph eke and martial glory,
Which unto them is more perfite riches
Than any wight imagin can or gesse;
For one Lefe givin of that noble tre
To any wight that hath done worthily
[An it be done so as it ought to be]
Is more honour than any thing erthly,
Witness of Rome, that foundir was truly

Of all knighthode and dedis marvelous,
Record I take of Titus Livius.
And as for her that crounid is in grene,
It is Flora, of these flouris goddesse,
And all that here on her awaiting bene
It are such folk that lovid idlenesse,
And not delite in no kind besinesse
But for to hunt, and hawke, and pley in medes,
And many othir such like idle dedes.
And for the grete delite and the plesaunce
They have to the Flour, and so reverently
They unto it doin such obeisaunce,
As ye may se. Now, fair Madame! quod I,
[If I durst ask] what is the cause and why
That knightis have the ensign of honour
Rathir by the Lefè than by the Flour?
Sothly, doughtir, quod she, this is the truth,
For knightes evir should be persevering
To seke honour without feintise or slouth,
Fro wele to bettir in all manir thing,
In sign of which with levis ay lasting
They be rewardid aftir ther degre.
Whose lusty grene may not appairid be,
But ay keping ther beauty fresh and grene,
For ther n'is no storme that may them deface,
Ne hail nor snowe, ne wind nor frostis kene,
Wherefore they have this propriety and grace;
And for the Flour within a litil space
Wollin be lost, so simple of nature

They be, that they no grevaunce may endure:
And every storme woll blowe them sone away,
Ne they lastè not but for a seson,
That is the cause [the very trouth to say]
That they may not by no way of reson
Be put to no such occupacion.
Madame, quod I, with all mine whole servise
I thank you now in my most humble wise;
For now I am ascertain'd thoroughly
Of every thing I desirid to knowe.
I am right glad that I have said, sothly,
Ought to your plesure, (if ye will me trow.)
Quod she ayen. But to whom do ye owe
Your service, and which wollin ye honour
[Pray tell me] this year, the Lefe or the Flour?
Madam, quod I, although I lest worthy,
Unto the Lefe I ow mine observaunce.
That is, quod she, right wel done certainly,
And I pray God to honour you advaunce,
And kepe you fro the wickid remembraunce
Of Melèbouch and all his cruiltie,
And all that gode and well-condition'd be;
For here I may no lengir now abide,
But I must follow the grete company
That ye may se yondir before you ride.
And forthwith, as I couth most humily
I toke my leve of her, and she gan hie
Aftir them as fast as evir she might,
And I drow homeward, for it was nigh night.

And put all that I had sene in writing,
Undir support of them that lust it rede.
O little boke! thou art so unconning,
How darst thou put thy self in prees for drede?
It is wondir that thou wexist not rede,
Sith that thou wost full lite who shall behold
Thy rude langage full boystously unfold.

THE WIF OF BATHES TALE

In olde days of the King Artour,
Of which that Bretons speken gret honour,
All was this lond fulfilled of Faerie;
The Elf quene with hire joly compaignie
Danced ful oft in many a grene mede,
This was the old opinion as I rede;
I speke of many hundred yeres ago,
But now can no man see non elves mo;
For now the grete charitee and prayeres
Of limitoures and other holy freres,
That serchen every land and every streme,
As thikke as motes in the sonne-beme,
Blissing halles, chambres, kichenes, and boures,
Citees and burghes, castles highe and toures,
Thropes and bernes, shepenes and dairies,
This maketh that ther ben no Faeries:
For ther as wont to walken was an elf,
Ther walketh now the limatour himself
In undermeles and in morweninges,
And sayth his matines and his holy thinges
As he goth in his limitatioun.
Women may now go safely up and doun,
In every bush, and under every tree,
Ther is non other Incubus but he,

And he ne will don hem no dishonour.

And so befell it that this King Artour
Had in his hous a lusty bachelor,
That on a day came riding fro river:
And happed that, alone as she was borne,
He saw a maiden walking him beforne,
Of which maid he anon, maugre hire hed,
By veray force beraft hire maidenhed:
For which oppression was swiche clamour,
And swiche pursuite unto the King Artour,
That damned was this knight for to be ded,
By cours of lawe, and shuld have lost his hed,
(Paraventure swiche was the statute tho)
But that the quene and other ladies mo
So longe praieden the king of grace,
Til he his lif him granted in the place,
And yaf him to the quene, all at hire will
To chese whether she wold him save or spill.
The quene thanketh the king with all hire might;
And after this thus spake she to the knight,
Whan that she saw hire time upon a day.
Thou standest yet (quod she) in swiche array,
That of thy lif yet hast thou not seuretee;
I grant thee lif if thou canst tellen me
What thing is it that women most desiren:
Beware, and kepe thy nekke bone from yren.
And if thou canst not tell it me anon,
Yet wol I yeve thee leve for to gon

A twelvemonth and a day to seke and lere
An answer suffisant in this matere;
And seuretee wol I have, or that thou pace,
The body for to yelden in this place.
Wo was the knight, and sorwefully he siketh:
But what? he may not don all as him liketh.
And at the last he chese him for to wende,
And come agen right at the yeres ende
With swiche answer as God wold him purvay,
And taketh his leve, and wendeth forth his way.
He seketh every hous and every place,
Wher as he hopeth for to finden grace,
To lernen what thing women loven moste;
But he ne coude ariven in no coste,
Wher as he mighte find in this matere
Two creatures according in fere.
Som saiden women loven best richesse,
Som saiden honour, som saiden jolinesse,

Som riche array, some saiden lust a-bedde,
And oft time to be widewe and to be wedde.
Some saiden that we ben in herte most esed
Whan that we ben yflatered and ypreised.
He goth ful nigh the sothe, I wol not lie;
A man shal winne us best with flaterie;
And with attendance and with besinesse
Ben we ylimed bothe more and lesse.
And som men saiden, that we loven best
For to be free, and do right as us lest,

And that no man reprove us of our vice,
But say that we ben wise and nothing nice:
For trewely ther n'is non of us all,
If any wight wol claw us on the gall,
That we n'ill kike for that he saith us soth;
Assay, and he shal find it that so doth:
For be we never so vicious withinne
We wol be holden wise and clene of sinne.
And som saiden, that gret delit han we
For to be holden stable and eke secre,
And in o purpos stedfastly to dwell,
And not bewreyen thing that men us tell;
But that tale is not worth a rake-stele.
Parde we women connen nothing hele,
Witnesse on Mida; wol ye here the Tale?
Ovide, amonges other thinges smale,
Said Mida had under his longe heres
Growing upon his hed two asses eres,
The whiche vice he hid, as he beste might,
Ful subtilly from every mannes sight,
That, save his wif, ther wist of it no mo;
He loved hire most, and trusted hire also;
He praied hire that to no creature
She n'olde tellen of his disfigure.
She swore him nay, for all the world to winne
She n'olde do that vilanie ne sinne,
To make hire husband han so foule a name:
She n'olde not tell it for hire owen shame.
But natheles hire thoughte that she dide

That she so longe shulde a conseil hide;
Hire thought it swal so sore about hire herte,
That nedely som word hire must asterte;
And sith she dorst nat telle it to no man,
Doun to a mareis faste by she ran;
Til she came ther hire herte was a-fire:
And as a bitore bumbleth in the mire,
She laid hire mouth unto the water doun.
Bewrey me not, thou water, with thy soun,
Quod she; to thee I tell it, and no mo,
Min husbond hath long asses eres two.
Now is min herte all hole, now is it out,
I might no lenger kepe it out of dout.
Here may ye see, though we a time abide,
Yet out it moste; we can no conseil hide.
The remenant of the Tale, if ye wol here,
Redeth Ovide, and ther ye may it lere.
This knight, of which my Tale is specially,
Whan that he saw he might not come therby,
(This is to sayn, what women loven most)
Within his brest ful sorweful was his gost.
But home he goth, he mighte not sojourne;
The day was come that homward must he turne.
And in his way it happed him to ride,
In all his care, under a forest side,
Wheras he saw upon a dance go
Of ladies foure and twenty, and yet mo.
Toward this ilke dance he drow ful yerne,
In hope that he som wisdom shulde lerne;

But certainly er he came fully there
Yvanished was this dance he n'iste not wher;
No creature saw he that bare lif,
Save on the grene he saw sitting a wif,
A fouler wight ther may no man devise.
Againe this knight this olde wif gan arise,
And saide Sire Knight, here forth ne lith no way.
Tell me what that ye seken by your fay,
Paraventure it may the better be:
Thise olde folk con mochel thing, quod she.
My leve mother, quod this knight, certain
I n'am but ded but if that I can fain
What thing it is that women most desire:
Coude ye me wisse I wold quite wel your hire.
Plight me thy trothe here in myn hond, quod she,
The nexte thing that I requere of thee
Thou shalt it do, if it be in thy might,
And I wol tell it you or it be night.
Have here my trouthe, quod the knight, I graunte.
Thanne, quod she, I dare me wel avaunte
Thy lif is sauf, for I wol stond therby,
Upon my lif the quene wol say as I.
Let see which is the proudest of hem alle,
That wereth on a kerchef or a calle,

That dare sayn nay of that I shal you teche.
Let us go forth withouten lenger speche.
Tho rowned she a pistel in his ere,
And bad him to be glad, and have no fere.

Whan they ben comen to the court, this knight
Said he had hold his day as he had hight,
And redy was his answer, as he saide.
Ful many a noble wif, and many a maide,
And many a widewe, for that they ben wise,
(The quene hireself sitting as a justice)
Assembled ben his answer for to here,
And afterward this knight was bode appere.
To every wight commanded was silence,
And that the knight shuld tell in audience
What thing that worldly women loven best.
This knight ne stood not still as doth a best,
But to this question anon answerd
With manly vois, that all the court it herd.
My liege Lady, generally, quod he,
Women desiren to han soverainetee,
As well over hir husband as hir love,
And for to ben in maistrie him above.
This is your most desire, though ye me kille;
Doth as you list, I am here at your wille.
In all the court ne was ther wif ne maide,
Ne widewe, that contraried that he saide,
But said he was worthy to han his lif.
And with that word up stert this olde wif
Which that the knight saw sitting on the grene.
Mercy, quod she, my soveraine lady Quene,
Er that your court depart, as doth me right.
I taughte this answer unto this knight,
For which he plighte me his trouthe there,

The firste thing I wold of him requere,
He wold it do, if it lay in his might.
Before this court than pray I thee, Sire, Knight,
Quod she, that thou me take unto thy wif,
For wel thou wost that I have kept thy lif:
If I say false, say nay upon thy fay.
This knight answered, Alas and wala wa!
I wot right wel that swiche was my behest.
For Goddes love as chese a new request:
Take all my good, and let my body go.
Nay than, quod she, I shrewe us bothe two:
For though that I be olde, foule, and pore,
I n'olde for all the metal ne the ore

That under erthe is grave, or lith above,
But if thy wif I were and eke thy love.
My love? quod he; nay, my dampnation.
Alas! that any of my nation
Shuld ever so foule disparaged be.
But all for nought; the end is this, that he
Constrained was, he nedes must hire wed,
And taketh this olde wif, and goth to bed.
Now wolden som men sayn paraventure,
That for my negligence I do no cure
To tellen you the joye and all the array
That at the feste was that ilke day.
To which thing shortly answeren I shal:
I say ther was no joye ne feste at al;
Ther n'as but hevinesse and mochel sorwe;

For prively he wedded hire on the morwe,
And all day after hid him as an oule,
So wo was him his wif loked so foule.
Gret was the wo the knight had in his thought
Whan he was with his wif a-bed ybrought;
He walweth, and he turneth to and fro.
This olde wif lay smiling evermo,
And said, O dere husbond, *benedicite!*
Fareth ever knight thus with wif as ye?
Is this the lawe of King Artoures hous?
Is every knight of his thus dangerous?
I am your owen love, and eke your wif,
I am she which that saved hath your lif,
And certes yet did I you never unright;
Why fare ye thus with me this firste night?
Ye faren like a man had lost his wit.
What is my gilt? for Goddess love tell it,
And it shal ben amended if I may.
Amended? quod this knight, alas! nay, nay,
It wol not ben amended never mo;
Thou art so lothly, and so olde also,
And therto comen of so low a kind,
That little wonder is though I walwe and wind;
So wolde God min herte wolde brest.
Is this, quod she, the cause of your unrest?
Ye certainly, quod he, no wonder is.
Now Sire, quod she, I coude amend all this,
If that me list, er it were dayes three,
So wel ye mighten bere you unto me.

But for ye speken of swiche gentillesse
As is descended out of old richesse;

That therefore shullen ye be gentilmen;
Swiche arrogance n'is not worth an hen.
Loke who that is most vertuous alway,
Prive and apert, and most entendeth ay
To do the gentil dedes that he can,
And take him for the gretest gentilman.
Crist wol we claime of him our gentillesse,
Not of our elders for hir old richesse;
For though they yeve us all hir heritage,
For which we claime to ben of high parage,
Yet may they not bequethen for no thing
To non of us hir vertuous living,
That made hem gentilmen called to be,
And bade us folwen hem in swiche degree.
Wel can the wise poet of Florence,
That highte Dant, speken of this sentence:
Lo in swiche maner rime is Dantes tale.
Ful selde up riseth by his branches smale
Prowesse of man, for God of his goodnesse
Wol that we claime of him our gentillesse;
For of our elders may we nothing claime
But temporel thing, that man may hurt and maim.
Eke every wight wot this as wel as I,
If gentillesse were planted naturelly
Unto a certain lineage doun the line,
Prive and apert, than wold they never fine

To don of gentillesse the faire office;
They mighten do no vilanie or vice.
Take fire, and bere it into the derkest hous
Betwix this and the Mount of Caucasus,
And let men shette the dores, and go thenne,
Yet wol the fire as faire lie and brenne
As twenty thousand men might it behold;
His office naturel ay wol it hold,
Up peril of my lif, til that it die.
Here may ye see wel how that genterie
Is not annexed to possession,
Sith folk ne don hir operation
Always, as doth the fire, lo, in his kind:
For God it wot men moun ful often find
A lordes sone do shame and vilanie.
And he that wol han pris of his genterie,
For he was boren of a gentil hous,
And had his elders noble and vertuous,
And n'ill himselven do no gentil dedes,
Ne folwe his gentil auncestrie that ded is,

He n'is not gentil, be he duk or erl,
For vilains sinful dedes make a cherl:
For gentillesse n'is but the renomee
Of thin auncestres for hir high bountee,
Which is a strange thing to thy persone:
Thy gentillesse cometh fro God alone;
Than cometh our veray gentillesse of grace;
It was no thing bequethed us with our place.

Thinketh how noble, as saith Valerius,
Was thilke Tullius Hostilius,
That out of poverte rose to high noblesse.
Redeth Senek, and redeth eke Boece,
Ther shall ye seen expresse that it no dred is
That he is gentil that doth gentil dedis:
And therefore, leve husbond, I thus conclude,
Al be it that min auncestres weren rude,
Yet may the highe God, and so hope I,
Granten me grace to liven vertuously;
Than am I gentil whan that I beginne
To liven vertuously and weiven sinne.
And ther as ye of poverte me repreve,
The highe God, on whom that we beleve,
In wilful poverte chese to lede his lif;
And certes every man, maiden, or wif,
May understand that Jesus heven king
Ne wold not chese a vicious living.
Glad poverte is an honest thing certain,
This wol Senek and other clerkes sain.
Who so that halt him paid of his poverte,
I hold him rich, al had he not a sherte.
He that coveiteth is a poure wight,
For he wold han that is not in his might;
But he that nought hath, ne coveiteth to have,
Is riche, although ye hold him but a knave.
Veray poverte is sinne proprely.
Juvenal saith of poverte merily,
The poure man whan he goth by the way,

Beforen the theves he may sing and play.
Poverté is hateful good; and, as I gesse,
A ful gret bringer out of besinesse;
A gret amender eke of sapience
To him that taketh it in patience.
Poverté is this, although it some elenge,
Possession that no wight wol challenge.
Poverté ful often, whan a man is low,
Maketh his God and eke himself to know.
Poverté a spectakel is, as thinketh me,
Thurgh which he may his veray frendes see.
And therefore, Sire, sin that I you not greve,
Of my poverté no more me repreve.
Now, Sire, of elde that ye repreven me:
And certes, Sire, though non auctoritee
Were in no book, ye gentiles of honour
Sain that men shuld an olde wight honour,
And clepe him Fader, for your gentillesse;
And auctours shal I finden, as I gesse.
Now ther ye sain that I am foule and old,
Than drede ye not to ben a cokewold;
For filthe, and elde also, so mote I the,
Ben grete wardeins upon chastitee.
But natheles, sin I know your delit,
I shal fulfill your worldly appetit.
Chese now (quod she) on of these thinges twey,
To han me foule and old til that I dey,
And be to you a trewe humble wif,
And never you displese in all my lif;

Or elles wol ye han me yonge and faire,
And take your aventure of the repaire
That shal be to your hous because of me,
Or in some other place it may wel be?
Now chese yourselven whether that you liketh.
This knight aviseth him, and sore siketh,
But at the last he said in this manere:
My lady and my love, and wif so dere,
I put me in your wise governance,
Cheseth yourself which may be most plesance
And most honour to you and me also,
I do no force the whether of the two,
For as you liketh, it sufficeth me.
Than have I got the maisterie, quod she,
Sin I may chese and governe as me lest.
Ye certes, wif, quod he, I hold it best.
Kisse me, quod she, we be no lenger wrothe,
For by my trouth I wol be to you bothe,
This to sayn, ye bothe faire and good.
I pray to God that I mote sterven wood
But I to you be al so good and trewe
As ever was wif sin that the world was newe,
And but I be to-morwe as faire to seen
As any lady, emperice, or quene,
That is betwix the est and eke the west,
Doth with my lif and deth right as you lest.
Cast up the curtein, loke how that it is.
And whan the knight saw veraily all this,
That she so faire was, and so yonge therto,

For joye he hent hire in his armes two:
His herte bathed in a bath of blisse,
A thousand time a-row he gan hire kisse:
And she obeyed him in every thing
That mighte don him plesance or liking.
And thus they live unto hir lives ende
In parfit joye; and Jesu Crist us sende
Husbondes meke and yonge, and fresh a-bed,
And grace to overlive hem that we wed.
And eke I pray Jesus to short hir lives
That wol not be governed by hir wives;
And old and angry nigards of dispence
God send hem sone a veray pestilence.

TRANSLATIONS FROM OVID'S EPISTLES

PREFACE TO THE TRANSLATION OF OVID'S EPISTLES. ²

The Life of Ovid being already written in our language, before the translation of his *Metamorphoses*, I will not presume so far upon myself, to think I can add any thing to Mr Sandys his undertaking.³

The English reader may there be satisfied, that he flourished in the reign of Augustus Cæsar; that he was extracted from

² Published in 8vo, in 1680. This version was made by several hands. See introductory remarks on Dryden's Translations. Johnson gives the following account of the purpose of Dryden's preface: "In 1680, the epistles of Ovid being translated by the poets of the time, it was necessary (says Dr Johnson) to introduce them by a preface; and Dryden, who on such occasions was regularly summoned, prefixed a discourse upon translation, which was then struggling for the liberty it now enjoys. Why it should find any difficulty in breaking the shackles of verbal interpretation, which must for ever debar it from elegance, it would be difficult to conjecture, were not the power of prejudice every day observed. The authority of Jonson, Sandys, and Holiday, had fixed the judgement of the nation; and it was not easily believed that a better way could be found than they had taken, though Fanshaw, Denham, Waller, and Cowley, had tried to give examples of a different practice."

³ George Sandys' Translation of Ovid was published in folio, in 1626.

an ancient family of Roman knights; that he was born to the inheritance of a splendid fortune;⁴ that he was designed to the study of the law, and had made considerable progress in it, before he quitted that profession, for this of poetry, to which he was more naturally formed. The cause of his banishment is unknown; because he was himself unwilling further to provoke the emperor, by ascribing it to any other reason than what was pretended by Augustus, which was, the lasciviousness of his Elegies, and his Art of Love.⁵ It is true, they are not to be excused in the severity of manners, as being able to corrupt a larger empire, if there were any, than that of Rome; yet this may be said in behalf of Ovid, that no man has ever treated the passion of love with so much delicacy of thought, and of expression, or searched into the nature of it more philosophically than he. And the emperor, who condemned him, had as little reason as another man to punish that fault with so much severity, if at least he were the author of a certain epigram, which is ascribed to him, relating to the cause of the first civil war betwixt himself and Mark Antony the triumvir, which is more fulsome than any

⁴ Ovid was born in the year of Rome 711, and died in 771 of the same æra.

⁵ The poet himself plainly intimates as much in an epistle to Fabius Maximus, where he represents himself as accusing Love of being the cause of his exile: *O puer! exilii, decepto causa magistro.* The deity replies to this charge, by alluding to the secret cause of his banishment, for which the looseness of his verses furnished only an ostensible reason: *Juro Nil nisi concessum nos te didicisse magistro, Artibus et nullum crimen inesse tuis, Utque hoc, sic utinam cetera defendere possis, Scis aliud quod te læserit esse magis.*

passage I have met with in our poet.⁶

To pass by the naked familiarity of his expressions to Horace, which are cited in that author's life, I need only mention one notorious act of his, in taking Livia to his bed, when she was not only married, but with child by her husband then living. But deeds, it seems, may be justified by arbitrary power, when words are questioned in a poet. There is another guess of the grammarians, as far from truth as the first from reason; they will have him banished for some favours, which they say he received from Julia, the daughter of Augustus, whom they think he celebrates under the name of Corinna in his Elegies; but he, who will observe the verses which are made to that mistress, may gather from the whole contexture of them, that Corinna was not a woman of the highest quality. If Julia were then married to Agrippa, why should our poet make his petition to Isis for her safe delivery, and afterwards condole her miscarriage; which, for aught he knew, might be by her own husband? Or, indeed, how durst he be so bold to make the least discovery of such a crime, which was no less than capital, especially committed against a person of Agrippa's rank? Or, if it were before her marriage, he would surely have been more discreet, than to have published an accident which must have been fatal to them both. But what most confirms me against this opinion, is, that Ovid himself complains, that the true person of Corinna was found out by the fame of his verses to her; which if it had been Julia, he durst not

⁶ Martial, lib. XI. epig. 21.

have owned; and, beside, an immediate punishment must have followed. He seems himself more truly to have touched at the cause of his exile in those obscure verses:

Cur aliquid vidi? cur noxia lumina feci?
Cur imprudenti cognita culpa mihi est?
Inscius Actæon vidit sine veste Dianam,
Præda fuit canibus non minus ille suis.

Namely, that he had either seen, or was conscious to somewhat, which had procured him his disgrace. But neither am I satisfied, that this was the incest of the emperor with his own daughter: for Augustus was of a nature too vindictive to have contented himself with so small a revenge, or so unsafe to himself, as that of simple banishment; but would certainly have secured his crimes from public notice, by the death of him who was witness to them. Neither have historians given us any sight into such an action of this emperor: nor would he, (the greatest politician of his time,) in all probability, have managed his crimes with so little secrecy, as not to shun the observation of any man. It seems more probable, that Ovid was either the confident of some other passion, or that he had stumbled, by some inadvertency, upon the privacies of Livia, and seen her in a bath: for the words

Sine veste Dianam, agree better with Livia, who had the fame of chastity, than with either of the Julias, who were both noted of incontinency. The first verses, which were made by him in

his youth, and recited publicly, according to the custom, were, as he himself assures us, to Corinna: his banishment happened not until the age of fifty; from which it may be deduced, with probability enough, that the love of Corinna did not occasion it: nay, he tells us plainly, that his offence was that of error only, not of wickedness; and in the same paper of verses also, that the cause was notoriously known at Rome, though it be left so obscure to after-ages.⁷

But to leave conjectures on a subject so uncertain,⁸ and to write somewhat more authentic of this poet. That he frequented the court of Augustus, and was well received in it, is most undoubted: all his poems bear the character of a court, and appear to be written, as the French call it, *cavalierement*: add to this, that the titles of many of his elegies, and more of his letters in his banishment, are addressed to persons well known to us, even at this distance, to have been considerable in that court.

Nor was his acquaintance less with the famous poets of his age, than with the noblemen and ladies. He tells you himself, in a particular account of his own life, that Macer, Horace, Tibullus,⁹

⁷ *Causa meae cunctis nimium quoque nota ruinae, Indicio non est testificanda meo.*

⁸ This curious and obscure subject is minutely investigated by Bayle, who quotes and confutes the various opinions of the learned concerning this point of secret history; and concludes, like Dryden, by leaving it very much where he found it. Were I to hazard a conjecture, I should rather think, with our poet, Ovid had made some imprudent, and perhaps fortuitous discovery relating to Livia.

⁹ Dryden speaks inaccurately, from a general recollection of the passage; for Ovid says distinctly, that the Fates did not give him time to cultivate the acquaintance of

Propertius, and many others of them, were his familiar friends, and that some of them communicated their writings to him; but that he had only seen Virgil.

If the imitation of nature be the business of a poet, I know no author, who can justly be compared with ours, especially in the description of the passions. And, to prove this, I shall need no other judges than the generality of his readers: for, all passions being inborn with us, we are almost equally judges, when we are concerned in the representation of them. Now I will appeal to any man, who has read this poet, whether he finds not the natural emotion of the same passion in himself, which the poet describes in his feigned persons. His thoughts, which are the pictures and results of those passions, are generally such as naturally arise from those disorderly motions of our spirits. Yet, not to speak too partially in his behalf, I will confess, that the copiousness of his wit was such, that he often writ too pointedly for his subject, and made his persons speak more eloquently than the violence of their passion would admit: so that he is frequently witty out of season; leaving the imitation of nature, and the cooler dictates of his judgment, for the false applause of fancy. Yet he seems

Tibullus, any more than of Virgil. The entire passage runs thus: *Temporis illius colui, fovique poetas: Quotque aderant vates, rebar adesse deos. Sæpe suas volucres legit mihi grandior ævo, Quæque nocet serpens, quæ juvat herba, Macer. Sæpe suos solitus recitare Propertius ignes, Jure sodalitiæ qui mihi junctus erat. Ponticus Heroo, Battus quoque clarus Iambo, Dulcia convictus membra fuere mei. Et tenuit nostras numerosus Horatius aures Dum ferit Ausonia carmina culta lyra Virgilium vidi tantum; nec avara Tibullo Tempus amicitiae fata dedere meæ. Trist. Lib. IV. Eleg. 9.*

to have found out this imperfection in his riper age; for why else should he complain, that his *Metamorphoses* was left unfinished? Nothing sure can be added to the wit of that poem, or of the rest; but many things ought to have been retrenched, which I suppose would have been the business of his age, if his misfortunes had not come too fast upon him. But take him uncorrected, as he is transmitted to us, and it must be acknowledged, in spite of his Dutch friends, the commentators, even of Julius Scaliger himself, that Seneca's censure will stand good against him;

Nescivit quod bene cessit relinquere:

he never knew how to give over, when he had done well, but continually varying the same sense an hundred ways, and taking up in another place what he had more than enough inculcated before, he sometimes cloy his readers, instead of satisfying them; and gives occasion to his translators, who dare not cover him, to blush at the nakedness of their father. This, then, is the allay of Ovid's writings, which is sufficiently recompensed by his other excellencies: nay, this very fault is not without its beauties; for the most severe censor cannot but be pleased with the prodigality of his wit, though at the same time he could have wished that the master of it had been a better manager. Every thing which he does becomes him; and if sometimes he appears too gay, yet there is a secret gracefulness of youth, which accompanies his writings, though the staidness and sobriety

of age be wanting. In the most material part, which is the conduct, it is certain, that he seldom has miscarried: for if his Elegies be compared with those of Tibullus and Propertius, his contemporaries, it will be found, that those poets seldom designed before they writ; and though the language of Tibullus be more polished, and the learning of Propertius, especially in his fourth book, more set out to ostentation; yet their common practice was to look no further before them than the next line; whence it will inevitably follow, that they can drive to no certain point, but ramble from one subject to another, and conclude with somewhat, which is not of a piece with their beginning:

Purpureus latè qui splendeat, unus et alter
Assuitur pannus, —

as Horace says; though the verses are golden, they are but patched into the garment. But our poet has always the goal in his eye, which directs him in his race; some beautiful design, which he first establishes, and then contrives the means, which will naturally conduct him to his end. This will be evident to judicious readers in his Epistles, of which somewhat, at least in general, will be expected.

The title of them in our late editions is *Epistolæ Heroidum*, the Letters of the Heroines. But Heinsius has judged more truly, that the inscription of our author was barely, Epistles; which he concludes from his cited verses, where Ovid asserts this work as

his own invention, and not borrowed from the Greeks, whom (as the masters of their learning) the Romans usually did imitate. But it appears not from their writings, that any of the Grecians ever touched upon this way, which our poet therefore justly has vindicated to himself. I quarrel not at the word *Heroidum*, because it is used by Ovid in his Art of Love:

Jupiter ad veteres supplex Heroidas ibat.

But, sure, he could not be guilty of such an oversight, to call his work by the name of *Heroines*, when there are divers men, or heroes, as, namely, Paris, Leander, and Acontius, joined in it. Except Sabinus, who writ some answers to Ovid's Letters,

(*Quam celer è toto rediit meus orbe Sabinus.*)

I remember not any of the Romans, who have treated on this subject, save only Propertius, and that but once, in his Epistle of Arethusa to Lycotas, which is written so near the style of Ovid, that it seems to be but an imitation; and therefore ought not to defraud our poet of the glory of his invention.

Concerning the Epistles, I shall content myself to observe these few particulars: first, that they are generally granted to be the most perfect pieces of Ovid, and that the style of them is tenderly passionate and courtly; two properties well agreeing with the persons, which were heroines, and lovers. Yet, where the characters were lower, as in *Ænone* and *Hero*, he has kept close to

nature, in drawing his images after a country life, though perhaps he has romanized his Grecian dames too much, and made them speak, sometimes, as if they had been born in the city of Rome, and under the empire of Augustus. There seems to be no great variety in the particular subjects which he has chosen; most of the Epistles being written from ladies, who were forsaken by their lovers: which is the reason that many of the same thoughts come back upon us in divers letters: but of the general character of women, which is modesty, he has taken a most becoming care; for his amorous expressions go no further than virtue may allow, and therefore may be read, as he intended them, by matrons without a blush.

Thus much concerning the poet: it remains that I should say somewhat of poetical translations in general, and give my opinion, (with submission to better judgments,) which way of version seems to be the most proper.

All translation, I suppose, may be reduced to these three heads.

First, that of metaphrase, or turning an author word by word, and line by line, from one language into another. Thus, or near this manner, was Horace his Art of Poetry translated by Ben Jonson. The second way is that of paraphrase, or translation with latitude, where the author is kept in view by the translator, so as never to be lost, but his words are not so strictly followed as his sense; and that too is admitted to be amplified, but not altered. Such is Mr Waller's translation of Virgil's fourth Æneid. The

third way is that of imitation, where the translator (if now he has not lost that name) assumes the liberty, not only to vary from the words and sense, but to forsake them both as he sees occasion; and, taking only some general hints from the original, to run divisions on the ground-work, as he pleases. Such is Mr Cowley's practice in turning two Odes of Pindar, and one of Horace, into English.

Concerning the first of these methods, our master Horace has given us this caution:

Nec verbum verbo curabis reddere, fidus

Interpres—

Nor word for word too faithfully translate;

as the Earl of Roscommon has excellently rendered it. Too faithfully is, indeed, pedantically: it is a faith like that which proceeds from superstition, blind and zealous. Take it in the expression of Sir John Denham to Sir Richard Fanshaw, on his version of the Pastor Fido:

That servile path thou nobly dost decline,
Of tracing word by word, and line by line:
A new and nobler way thou dost pursue,
To make translations and translators too:
They but preserve the ashes, thou the flame,
True to his sense, but truer to his fame.

It is almost impossible to translate verbally, and well, at the same time; for the Latin (a most severe and compendious language) often expresses that in one word, which either the barbarity, or the narrowness, of modern tongues cannot supply in more. It is frequent, also, that the conceit is couched in some expression, which will be lost in English:

Atque iidem venti vela fidemque ferent.

What poet of our nation is so happy as to express this thought literally in English, and to strike wit, or almost sense, out of it?

In short, the verbal copier is encumbered with so many difficulties at once, that he can never disentangle himself from all. He is to consider, at the same time, the thought of his author, and his words, and to find out the counterpart to each in another language; and, besides this, he is to confine himself to the compass of numbers, and the slavery of rhyme. It is much like dancing on ropes with fettered legs: a man may shun a fall by using caution; but the gracefulness of motion is not to be expected: and when we have said the best of it, it is but a foolish task; for no sober man would put himself into a danger for the applause of escaping without breaking his neck. We see Ben Jonson could not avoid obscurity in his literal translation of Horace, attempted in the same compass of lines: nay, Horace himself could scarce have done it to a Greek poet:

Brevis esse laboro, obscurus fio:

either perspicuity or gracefulness will frequently be wanting. Horace has indeed avoided both these rocks in his translation of the three first lines of Homer's *Odyssey*, which he has contracted into two:

*Dic mihi, musa virum, captæ post tempora Trojæ,
Que mores hominum multorum vidit, et urbes.*
Muse speak the man, who, since the siege of Troy,
So many towns, such change of manners saw.

Roscommon.

But then the sufferings of Ulysses, which are a considerable part of that sentence, are omitted:

Ὅς μάλα πολλὰ πλάγχθη.

The consideration of these difficulties, in a servile, literal translation, not long since made two of our famous wits, Sir John Denham,¹⁰ and Mr Cowley, to contrive another way of

¹⁰ Sir John Denham gives his opinion on this subject in the preface to "The Destruction of Troy;" which he does not venture to call a translation, but "an Essay on the second book of Virgil's *Æneis*." – "I conceive it is a vulgar error, in translating poets, to affect being *fidus interpres*; let that care be with them who deal in matters of fact, or matters of faith; but whosoever aims at it in poetry, as he attempts what is not required, so he shall never perform what he attempts: for it is not his business alone to translate language into language, but poesy into poesy; and poesy is of so subtle a spirit, that in the pouring out of one language into another, it will all evaporate; and if a new spirit be not added in the transfusion, there will remain nothing but a *caput*

turning authors into our tongue, called, by the latter of them, imitation. As they were friends, I suppose they communicated their thoughts on this subject to each other; and therefore their reasons for it are little different, though the practice of one is much more moderate. I take imitation of an author, in their sense, to be an endeavour of a later poet to write like one, who has written before him, on the same subject; that is, not to translate his words, or to be confined to his sense, but only to set him as a pattern, and to write, as he supposes that author would have done, had he lived in our age, and in our country.

mortuum, there being certain graces and happinesses peculiar to every language, which give life and energy to the words; and whosoever offers at verbal translation, shall have the misfortune of that young traveller, who lost his own language abroad, and brought home no other instead of it; for the grace of the Latin will be lost by being turned into English words, and the grace of the English by being turned into the Latin phrase."

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