early version of iambic pentameter, and stylistic devices, like fast-paced
dialogue, autobiographical asides, or the familiar ironic, self-deprecating
Chaucerian narrator, predecessor of the unreliable narrator of the modern
novel. The profound medievalism of Chaucer's poetry offers a glimpse of
an earlier and much different world, but one that is seen through the eyes
of an intelligent and detached persona who seems uncannily modern. In
the dream visions and other poems, for example, we find many issues that
still have relevance—the difficulty of accepting the finality of death, the
vagaries of fame, the class issues involved in choosing a spouse, even the problem of getting by on one's pension—but
reflected through a range of traditional poetic genres that were popular
over six hundred years ago. These poems thus mediate between past and
present and offer us entry to a world that seems at once forbiddingly distant
and hauntingly present.

My thanks go to many helpers in the making of this Norton Critical
Edition. The list must begin with the teacher who first introduced me to
Chaucer, V. A. Kolve, whose lucid and elegant instruction provided an
indispensable framework for understanding and a model of teaching I can
emulate but never achieve.

The history of the English language is conventionally divided into three
periods. The first, "Old English" (or "Anglo-Saxon"), is the language of
Beowulf, covering the period of English up to about 1100. The second,
"Middle English," is the language of Chaucer, and extends to about 1500.
English after 1500 is generally referred to as "Modern English." Just as
the writing of John Updike or Toni Morrison is radically different from the
writing of Shakespeare, Middle English evolved significantly over its four-
hundred-year history. It was also spoken in a number of different regional
dialects that could likewise diverge as dramatically from each other as the
English of the British Isles today differs from that spoken in the United
States or Australia. Chaucer wrote in the language of London, which itself
evoluted into standard English as we know it, making his poetry easier for
modern readers than the Middle English that originated in other parts of
England like the Northern or Midlands regions.

There are nonetheless many fascinating and complex grammatical and
phonological differences between and within each of the three broad his-
torical periods in the English language. A student wishing to learn more
about these can consult the sources listed in the section on "Language,
Recordings, and Editing," in the Selected Bibliography at the end of this
Norton Critical Edition. Indeed, it is my hope that acquaintance with the
beauty of Chaucer's poetry will spark the interest of students, prompting
them to go further in studying the language in which his poems were
written. The standard editions of Chaucer's complete works, such as the
Riverside or others listed in the Selected Bibliography, also include useful
introductions to Chaucer's Middle English. This Norton Critical Edition
does not attempt to duplicate these more comprehensive treatments, and
the information offered in this "quick course" should not be mistaken for
full understanding.

Fortunately, though, unlike Old English (which is truly a foreign lan-
guage to the speaker of Modern English), Middle English can be under-
stood without comprehensive grammatical instruction. The extensive
glossing in this edition should reduce the immediate need for such instruc-
tion; the reader will quickly pick up such differences as are found, for
example, in the pronoun system (where one pronoun "hir(e)" does double
duty for both "her" and "their" and "his" for "his" and "its"). A few addi-
tional tips to help get started: Middle English word order can be a little
tricky, for the object precedes the verb much more frequently than in
Modern English, or the verb may be separated from the subject by other
kinds of modifying phrases (as in line 95 of the Book of the Duchess—“Such sorrow this lady to herself took”). Several rules of Modern English do not apply to Middle English. Verb tense, for example, is often inconsistent. Also, rather than canceling itself out, the double negative has the rhetorical effect of intensification; for example, Legend of Good Women 5–8—“there is noon dwelling in this contree / that either hath in heven or hell / he be”—would be translated in modern English “there is nobody who dwells in this country / who has been in hell or heaven” rather than literally “there is not nobody ... The lack of modern punctuation in medieval manuscripts should also be kept in mind, as phrases and clauses frequently refer forward as well as backward in a much more flexible construction of meaning than we are accustomed to in Modern English texts.

Pronunciation of Vowels and Consonants

Even a student reading silently should be trying to “hear” the poetry in Chaucer’s verse. Otherwise, the experience of Chaucer will be regrettably incomplete. Reading Chaucer aloud does require a little special training. While a full appreciation of the differences between the sounds of Modern and Middle English is a matter for years of study, the beginning reader willing to make a small investment of time can make a start without too much difficulty. The biggest difference between the sound system of Modern English and that of Middle English comes in the vowels, for over the course of the fifteenth century a linguistic event known as “The Great Vowel Shift” gradually but profoundly altered the value of the “long vowels” in English. Because the long vowels shifted their value in a systematic way, we can approximate Chaucer’s original pronunciation by working “backward” from the long vowel sounds of Modern English to reconstruct their predecessors in Middle English. Happily, since most of the “short vowels” did not change significantly, there are a relatively limited number of sound changes that the modern reader needs to master.

Most Middle English consonants also are not considerably different from those in Modern English. Notably, however, consonants that are silent in Modern English were pronounced in Middle English, with the exception of the “gh” in French loan words. Thus, in the word “know,” the “k” sound is pronounced in Middle English, but in the word “sigh,” the “g” sound is nasalized as in French but not pronounced. Also silent in French loan words, and in some common short Middle English words, is initial “h,” as in “honour” or “his.” In contrast, the consonant combination “gh” is pronounced as a guttural similar to the German “ich” (there is no Modern English equivalent), and the Middle English “r” is trilled. Also pronounced in Middle English was the final “e” (pronounced “ih” or “Love,” because the regular ten-syllable line of iambic pentameter is complete without additional syllables; nor would a final “e” be required at the end of this line, where it is not written in the word “fel.” In contrast, in the first line of the Legend of Good Women (“A thousand tymes have I herd men telle”), the “e” in “tymes” would be pronounced, to fill out the meter, as would the final “e” as written at the end of the line.

Table of Sound Changes

In the interests of simplicity, I have listed in the table below only those vowels that differ significantly between Middle and Modern English. For convenience, I have also included diphthongs (vowel sounds that glide between two different values). Unlike most such charts, this one puts Modern English on the left side, so that the student can work back from the speech values that he or she already knows. This table should be viewed as a study aid. It does not pretend to cover all the finer nuances of Middle English pronunciation. Again, the reader is directed to the sources in the Selected Bibliography at the end of this Norton Critical Edition. Especially useful are recordings of professional scholars reading Chaucer aloud, like those produced by The Chaucer Studio (and included in the Selected Bibliography).

Vowel Sound Changes, Working “Backward” from Modern to Middle English

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Modern English Sound</th>
<th>Modern English Spelling</th>
<th>Middle English Sound</th>
<th>Middle English Spelling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a, as in “cat,” “after”</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>“not,” “hot” (American)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a, as in “fame,” “wake”</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>“fall,” “father”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a, as in “day,” “they”</td>
<td>ai, ay, ei, ey</td>
<td>between “day” and “die”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aw, as in “law,” “cause”</td>
<td>au, aw</td>
<td>“house,” “town”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e, as in “sweet,” “trod,” “feet,” “doe”</td>
<td>e, ee, ie</td>
<td>“wake,” “break”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i, as in “I,” “thou,” “ife,” “y”</td>
<td>i, y</td>
<td>“feet,” “he”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o, as in “loan,” “go”</td>
<td>o, oo</td>
<td>“trod,” “saw”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o, as in “do,” “boot”</td>
<td>o, oo</td>
<td>“doe,” “boat”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ow, as in “how,” “round”</td>
<td>ou, ow</td>
<td>“too,” “moon”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the major changes listed above, several more subtle changes and features should be noted and observed when possible. In general, even the short vowels in Middle English are slightly more open than those in Modern English, so that the word “but” rhymes with “put” (as opposed to “putt”) and the word “tongue” rhymes with “song.” Middle English is also influenced more strongly than Modern English by the...
French "u," as in recent loan-words like "vertu." "U" is also lightly pronounced in some "eu," "ew" glides (e.g., "fewe," "lewed," "shewe," and "shrewe") and "ou," "ow" (in words that do not have the Modern English "ow" sound). Bracketed spellings in the table are those not represented in this edition.

Opening Verse of the *Parliament of Fowls*

Represented Phonetically

This phonetic transcription follows the verse in its original spelling. Spellings in the transcription are designed to approximate Modern American Pronunciation while avoiding the International Phonetic alphabet as unfamiliar to many students; the result should be a rough approximation of Middle English. This exercise is meant to get a student started quickly with the important experience of feeling the language in mouth and ear, not to replace listening to tapes and studying other sources to improve language performance. The "o" in the words "so" and "saw" should be slightly relaxed, between Modern English "so" and "saw"; italicized "r" is a reminder to trill. Through the following online link to Francis De Vries reading this verse for the Chaucer Studio, a student can find a quick point of reference and comparison: <http://english.byu.edu/chaucer/early.htm>.

The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne,  
Th'assay so hard, so sharp the conquering,  
The dredful joy alway that slit so yerne,  
Al this mene I by Love, that my feling  
Astonyeth with his wonderful weryng  
So sore ywis that whan I on him thinke  
Nat wot I wel wher that I flite or sink.

The leef so shortt, the creft so longe to lern-uh,  
Thassay so hard, so sharpp the konkwering,  
The dredful joy alway that slit so yern-uh,  
Al this main Ee bee Lov, thot mee falling  
Astonyeth with is wonderfull weryngen  
So sorrt ce-wiss thot whan Ee on im think-uh  
Not wot Ee wel wher thot Ee flait or sink-uh.
The Book of the Duchess

The Book of the Duchess occupies an important position at the head of Chaucer's poetic canon. His earliest significant narrative poem, it bears marks of the poet's youth and inexperience—in its comparatively ragged meter, for instance, and in its sometimes jarring mixture of courtly and comical themes—but at the same time it is a poem of undeniable emotional power, which skillfully draws upon classical sources and medieval French models. Although Chaucer does not present himself as a known poet at court, as he would in his later works, his narrative persona—untutored, self-deprecating, even foolish—is fully realized and consistent. He moves within the conventional form of the dream vision with the confidence and originality of a master poet. Chaucer innovates within the form by having his narrator fall asleep over a classical story that itself contains a dream that foreshadows the one he is about to experience. Then, like a series of cleverly constructed Chinese boxes, the black knight's story of his lady's loss nests inside a parallel narrative of a (e)hart hunt, which rests within the dreamer's untold story of his mysterious affliction. The complexity of the poem's form is in meaningful tension with the simplicity of its message: death is final, and the grief it causes unspeakable.

These features are remarkable considering the likely early date of the Book of the Duchess. Of all Chaucer's poems, it is the one most securely linked to a specific occasion, the death of John of Gaunt's wife, Blanche of Lancaster, from the plague on September 12, 1368. Although early editions titled the poem "The Dreame of Chaucer," in the Prologue to the Legend of Good Women (418), the poet himself calls it "the Deeth of Blaunche the Duchesse." Blanche is thus clearly the identity of the lady "Whyte," described at length by the man in black within the poem. More word play confirms this identification later, when we are told that a king rides, at the conclusion of a hunt, to "a longe castel with walles whyte, / By Seynt Johan, on a ric he hille" (I 318-19). Critics agree that John is here identified as John of Gaunt, Earl of Richmond ("riche mont" is French for "riche hille") and Duke of Lancaster (imaginatively derived from "longe castel"). These references have implications, of course, for the poem's date. Since the Book of the Duchess commemorates Blanche after her death, it cannot have been written earlier than 1368, and most scholars believe that it is unlikely to have been written after 1372, when Gaunt would no longer have held the title Earl of Richmond, though there is less than unanimous agreement about this second date. An early date is also suggested by the fact that the poem is written in a four-beat line, rather than the five-beat line Chaucer favored in his later verse. At all events, the poem was most likely written when Chaucer was a relatively young and untested poet, probably just in his mid twenties. His patron, John of Gaunt, would also have been a young man, only twenty-eight at the time of his wife's death.

The young poet took on a difficult and ambitious theme. Death is hard to accept at any point in life; the death of a young person is especially painful, and even though the Middle Ages was a time of political marriages among the

nobility, nothing suggests that John of Gaunt did not care deeply about his lovely young wife. Two marriages later, one a union of deep affection to Chaucer's own sister-in-law, Katherine Swynford, Gaunt still specified, in the burial instructions that formed part of his will, his wish that he be laid to rest beside his "most deare late wife Blanche." But Blanche not only died young; she fell to a frightening and gruesome disease. The plague that swept through Europe in the late fourteenth century was a feature of the literature of the period, informing both the stylistic decisions of the poet and his audience's experience of the context. The man in black, a figure that the poet describes is any mention of the Christian afterlife, leading some readers to speculate that Chaucer and his contemporaries may have had an understanding of death as a frightening and gruesome disease. 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anholic, confined to his bedchamber, he is feomitated and in need of correction. His dream gives him access to a naturalized, courtly world where he can again take charge as a man helping a friend come to terms with the loss of his wife. Thus, the ambivalent attitude toward women so pervasive in Chaucer's later work—for example, in the Legend of Good Women—emerges even here, in his first major poem.

To some extent that ambivalence is inevitable; it is a feature of Chaucer's time period and of the language available to him to describe the relationship between the sexes. The very form in which he worked—the philosophical dream vision—carried assumptions about the right subordination of imaginative and bodily experience to a unitary spiritual truth that was bound to work ultimately against an over-valuation of romantic love. The ultimate prototype of this kind of poem was the Consolation of Philosophy by the late classical philosopher Boethius, in which the allegorical figure of Lady Philosophy comes to the suffering writer, imprisoned and victimized by political persecution, to banish from his soul any attachment to the capricious world of Fortune. Compared to many other medieval poems that similarly worked within the Boethian tradition, the Book of the Duchess finally demonstrates an admirable originality and independence in its use of the form. Although framed within a very specific aristocratic world with values much different from our own, it is not only a humanist poem, but a human one. For in this poem, no figure of Philosophy (or as she is styled in other texts, Reason or Nature) comes to guide the dreamer out of his quandary or to explain to the black knight why he should give up his grief. Instead, with uncommon poignancy, two mortal men struggle to find a way to console each other. Their communication at once dignifies poetic tradition and exposes its limitation—its silence in the face of Fortune's ultimate weapon and the final blow that Nature has in store for all her creatures.

The text here is based chiefly on the version found in the Fairfax manuscript (Fairfax 16, Bodleian Library).

The Book of the Duchess

I have gret wonder, by this light
How that I live, for day ne night
I may nat slepe wel nought,
I have so many an ydel thought
5 Purely for defecte of slepe
That, by my trouthe, I take no kepe
Of nothing, how it cometh or gorth,
Ne me nis nothing leef no loth.
Al is yliche good to me,
10 Joye or sorwe, whereas it be,
For I have feyling in nothinge,
But as it were a mased thing


1. Nor is anything pleasing or displeasing to me. Everything is equally desirable to me (that is, I am without desire for any of it).
That trewely I that made this book
Had pitee swee and swich rothe
To rede hir sorwe, that, by my trouthe,
I ferde "the worse at the morwe."  
In reading about/true
I ferde "the worse at the morwe;"
got on "morwe" (morning, day)
From thinking about/sorrow
So when this lady coude here no word
hear
That no mane mighte finde hir lord,
Full ofte she swowned and seyd "Allas!"
sworn, fainting
For sorwe ful new highe she was,
a little importance
Almost crazy
Ne she coude no reed but oon.
Do not know where
But down on knees she sat anon,
at once
And weep, that pitee was to here.
(sh) wept piteously
"A mercy, swete lady dere!"
Said
Quod" she to Juno, hir goddesse;
Give
"Help me out of this distresse,
That trewely I that made this book.
And yeve me grace to see
Sone," or wher whoso he be,
Or how he fareth," or in what wyse,"
how he is doing/manner
And I shal make yow sacrifyse,
"And weep, that pitee was to here."
"No mane mighte finde hir lord,"
So it arysto therafter soon;
"And weep, that pitee was to here."
"Through which I simply"
"That trewely I that made this book.
And yeve me grace to see"
"With that word she heng doun the hed,"
"Through which I simply"
"I ferde "the worse at the morwe;"
"With that word she heng doun the hed,"
"I ferde "the worse at the morwe;"
"That trewely I that made this book.
And yeve me grace to see"
"That trewely I that made this book.
And yeve me grace to see"
"That trewely I that made this book.
And yeve me grace to see"
"That trewely I that made this book.
And yeve me grace to see"
5. Although Ovid's Metamorphoses names four of the thousand sons of the god of sleep, Echymapasteys, Morpheus, and Eclympasteyre, I will discuss them in a later section.

160 Go faste into the Grete See, quickly / i.e., the Mediterranean
And bid him that, on alle thinge, quickly / instruct / above all else
He take up Seys body the king, the body of King Seys
And this messager took leve and wente, where / lies
Upon his wye and never ne stente, cause it to go
The qene, ther she lyth alone, quickly / beyond denial
And shee hir shirly, it is no nay, destroy
How it was dreynt this other day, destroy
And doo it goon to Alcyone, make / just
The queene, ther she lyth alone, used to do
And shewe hir shirly, it is no nay, During the time
It was as wynde as it was blithe, During the time
Till he come to the darke valey, stoped
Right as it was woned to doo, stopped
And tolde him what he shulde doone, stopped
And cryed "awaketh! wonder hye.", During the time
As helle pit overal aboute; During the time
Who slept and did noon other werk.
Cam renninge fro the cliffes adown, hurred along quickly
That maked a deedly sleepinge soun,
That was the god of slepe's heyre, beyond denial
There these goddes laye and sleepe,
That was under a rokke y-grave,
That stant bytwene roches twey,
Some henge hir chin upon hir breste,
That was the god of slepes heyre,
That sleepe' and did noon other werk.
Who slept / no
As helle pit overal aboute;
That he had red this tale
And overlooked it everydel,
Me thought wonder if it were so,
For I had never herde speke er tho,
For in your sorwe there Iyth no reed,
That Iyth ful pale and nothing rody.
Came renninge fro the cliffes adown,
The quene, ther she Iyth alone,
That Iyth pale and nothing rody.
That was the god of sleepe's heyre,
That sleepe' and did noon other werk.
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That he had red this tale
And overlooked it everydel,
Me thought wonder if it were so,
For I had never herde speke er tho,
For in your sorwe there Iyth no reed,
That Iyth ful pale and nothing rody.
215 Of no goddess’ that could make
Men to sleepe ne for to wake, 
For I ne knewe never God but oon, 
And in my game I seyde anon—
And yet me list right evel to pleye—
240 Rather than that I shulde dye
Though deafeate of sleepeing thus,
I wolde yfelthike Morpheus
Or his godesse, dame Juno,
Or som wight elles, I ne rought who,
245 To make me sleepe and have som reste,
I wil yive him the alderbeste
Yif’t that ever abode his lyve,
And here onwarde, right now as bluye, 
If he wol make me sleepe a lyte, 
250 Of downe of pure doves wytes
I wil he yf he a fether bed,
Rayed with golde and right wel cled
In fyn blak satinn doteuremee, 
And many a pillow, and every here
255 Of cloth of Reynes, to sleepe softe;
Him thar nat nede to tumen ofte.
And I wol yive him al that falles
To a chambre, and al his halles
I wol do peyne’t with pure golde
260 And tapite hem ful many folde
Of o sute; this shal he have,
If I wiste whose were his care,
If he can make me sleepe some,
As did the godesse Alcyone.
265 And thus this ilke god Morpheus
May winne of me me fees’s thus
Than ever he wan, and to Juno,
That is his godesse, I shal so do,
Or his godesse, dame Juno,
270 And som wight elles, I ne rought who,
I'm not particular as to whom.
Or some other being, I’m not particular as to whom.
I never knew about any God except for one (that is, the Christian God). (This observation underscores the distinction between the ancient age of “kind” or nature, when the Ovidian story takes place, and the Christian Middle Ages. Despite his religious and philosophical advantages, however, the narrator brings a comically literal mind to his interpretation of the story.)

And yet I really did not feel in a playful spirit.

1. For I never knew about any God except for one (that is, the Christian God). (This observation underscores the distinction between the ancient age of “kind” or nature, when the Ovidian story takes place, and the Christian Middle Ages. Despite his religious and philosophical advantages, however, the narrator brings a comically literal mind to his interpretation of the story.)

2. I would like to give this some
3. Or some other being, I’m not particular as to whom.
4. Or cloth from Beeneus; (to cause him) to sleep softly. He will not be forced to toss and turn.
5. And hang them with a multitude of tapestries, all in one pattern.
For ther was noon of hem' that fenned
To singe, for ech' of hem him peyned
To finde out' marry craby' notes;
They ne spared nat hit throtes.
And, sooth to seyn, 'my chamber' was
Full wel depeyned," and with glas,
Were al the windowes wel-y-glased,
Ful clere," and nat an hole y-crased,
That' to beholde it was yett joye.
So that holo on the story' of Troye
Was in the glasinge y-wrought' thus,
Of Ector and of Kinge Priamus,
Of Achilles and Kinge Lamedoun,
Of Medea and of Jasoun,
And al men spekeo of huntinge,
And Paris were the SOns of the Trojan king Priam, and Lamedon was his father, Acbilles
pictures and captions, The figures listed each have some connection to the story of Troy: Hector
ill-fated lovers Jason and Medea, though not/articipants in the ancient story of Troy, are described
in medieval Trojan romances; Medea helpe Jason win the Golden Fleece and was later betrayed
Paris was the cause of the Trojan war, Lavinia was the Trojan Aeneas's bride later in Latium, The
he now finds himself are taken from the description of the Garden of Love in this poem; included
by him; Chaucer tells their story in the
And fnl atempre, for soothe,'O it was;
To singe, for echo of hem him peyned'o
To finde out' mery crafty' notes;
Ful weI depeynted,'o and with glas
For hooly al the story'O of Troye
Were al the windowes weI y-glased,'o
And I herd goinge, both up and doune,
Whether it were dere or hors of soune,'O
It seemed to me
truly very mild
waS
a

15
8, Text and gloss mean literally the script of the story and commentary on it. In this context, probably
pictures and captions. The figures listed each have some connection to the story of Troy: Hector
Paris were the sons of the Trojan king Priam, and Lamedon was his father. Achilles was a
great Greek warrior who fought against Troy. Helen was the Greek queen whose abduction by
Paris was the cause of the Trojan war. Lavinia was the Trojan Aeneas's bride later in Latium. The
ill-fated lovers Jason and Medea, though not participants in the ancient story of Troy, are described
in medieval Trojan romances. Medea helped Jason win the Golden Fleece and was later betrayed,
by him; Chaucer tells their story in the
9, Lymeres: hounds led on a leash who track game by scent. Relayes: hounds positioned in advance
on the probable course of the hunt to replace dogs grown tired,
Octavian also figures in Christian interpretations of the poem, as he was the ruler of Rome "t the
time of the birth of Christ.
And if it were, as it seemed, so it seemed, to those who believed it to be so. Then forth she walked quietly right up to anything, to the narrator's surprise.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Line</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Respectively, the goddess of flowers and of the west wind.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The list includes harts (mature male red deer), hinds (female red deer),</td>
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<tr>
<td>430</td>
<td>Was ful the wode, and many roes,</td>
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<td>435</td>
<td>That though Argus,</td>
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<td>440</td>
<td>I was ware of a man in blak,</td>
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<td>445</td>
<td>Its is no need eek for to axe,</td>
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<tr>
<td>450</td>
<td>For by tho' figures move al ken,</td>
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<tr>
<td>455</td>
<td>What aileth him to sitten here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>460</td>
<td>That joye gete I never noon,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>465</td>
<td>But forth they roamed wonder faste</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2. Respectively, the goddess of flowers and of the west wind.

3. Such great trees, so very strong, farr to fifty fathoms in height, (their trunks) clear of branch or twig, their tops wide and likewise full. (A fathom is a measurement of about six feet, based on the distance between a man's fingertips when his arms are extended.)

4. The list of deer includes harts (mature male red deer), hinds (female red deer), stags (male fallow deer), does (female fallow deer), bucks (male mature fallow deer), and roes (fallow deer, one year old). "Sowre" (male fallow deer, four years old), bucks (male mature fallow deer).

5. Al is from the Arabic al-"Ihlas, a ninth-century Arab mathematician and author of astronomical tables; his name here is taken from the Old French "Algas," in the Romance of the Rose 1270-1280.

6. The man in black's preface, the English prince John of Gaunt, would have been twenty-eight at the time of his wife's death in 1368; the discrepancy in age may be due to miscopying.

7. His dead and left me and gone away, and thus abandoned me to sorrow. (Although the man in black makes it clear that his lady has died, his narrator mysteriously does not seem to take his meaning, explanations for this misunderstanding vary from the narrator's past to his present, or perhaps the dreary takes the knight's expression here to be more poetic convention. Line 480 first appears in the 1532 edition of William Thynne and so may not be original to Chaucer; see also the note to lines 51-56.)
His sorrowful herte gan faste faynte,
And his spirites weken dede;
The blood was Red, for pure drede,
Doun to his hert to make him warme.
For well it felle, the heret had harm-
To wite eek why it was adrad,
By kynde, and for to make it glad,
For it is membre principal
Of the body. And that made al
His heue change and wexe grene
And pale, for ther no blood is sene
In no maner lime of his.
Annoo therwith whom I saw this,
He ferde thus evel ther he sete,
I wente and stond right at his fete
And grette him, but he speke nought,
But argued with his owne thought,
And in his witte disputed faste
Why and how his lye might laste;
He thoughte his sorwes were so smerte
And lay so colde upon his herte;
So, thogh his sorwe and hevy thought,
Made him that he ne herde me nought,
He seyde, "I pray thee, be nat wrooth,
Debonairly and nothing loude.
He seyde, "I prey thee, be nat wrooth,
I herde thee nat, to seyn the sooth,
Ne I saw thee nat, sir, twrely.
A goode sir, no fors," quod I,
"I am right sorry if I have ought,
Pardon me / said
"I thanke thee that thou woldest
I wolde, as wis God may help me so,
And telleth me of your sorwes smerte;
As if he were a different person
He made it nouter tough ne quenye,
And I saw that, and gan m'squyenye
With him, and for to make him warme.
Right wonder skillful and reasonable,
As me thoughte, for al his bale.
"Anonright I gan finde a tale"
To him, to look wher I might ought
Have more knowyng of his thought.
"Sir," quod I, "this game is doon;
I holde that this hert be gooyn;
And these hunes conco him nowher see.
"I do no fors therof," quod he;
"My thought is theron never a del.
"By our Lord," quod I, "I trow you wel,
Right so me thinketh by your chere.
But, sir, o thing wol ye here?
Me thinketh in gret sorwe, I yow see;
But certes, good sir, if that ye
Wolle ought discure me your wo,
A goode sir, no fors," quod he;
"I thanke thee that thou woldest
I wolde, as wis God may help me so,
Amende it, if I can or may,
Ye mowe preve it by assay.
For, by my trouthe, to make yow hool;
Wolde ought discure me your wo,
As who seyth, "Nay, that wol nat be;"
Graunt mercy, goode friende, quod he,
"I am right sorry if I have ought,"
I ther withal, to make ease to your herte,
That semeth ful seke under your syde.
But with that he lookd on me asyde,
As who seyth, "Nay, that wol nat be;"
"Graunt mercy, goode friende, quod he,
"I am right sorry if I have ought,"
I ther withal, to make ease to your herte,
That semeth ful seke under your syde.
But with that he lookd on me asyde,
As who seyth, "Nay, that wol nat be;"
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Graunt mercy, goode friende, quod he,
"I am right sorry if I have ought,"
I ther withal, to make ease to your herte,
That semeth ful seke under your syde.
But with that he lookd on me asyde,
As who seyth, "Nay, that wol nat be;"
Graunt mercy, goode friende, quod he,
6. The good things in my life have come to grief, and at an times my merrymaking has turned to anger.

To the extent that Tesiphus, who lies in hell, cannot recount greater sorrow than can my peas, o in peying and in werre.

In wrathe is turned my pleying, and al my laughter to weping, My glade thoughtes to hevinesse,

For who seeth me first on morwe, May nat of more sorwe telle.

Alas, how mighte I fare werre? And al abawedo whersoo I be, My love is hate, my slepe waking, My mirthe and meles is fasting, In dredeo is al my sikernesse, Myn he leO is turned into seknesse,

Myn boldnesse is turned to shame, 7. The goddess Fortune governs earthly power and mutability. Many featues of her description here are printed in the Contexts section of this Norton Critical Edition.

The traiteresse fals and ful of gyle, Hir moste worship and hir flour is that is brought up, she set al doun. All aboute, for it is nothing stable, The false theef! What hath she done, And whan I saw my fers awey, Now by the fyre, now at table; Therwith Fortune seyde, “Chek here!”

For fals Fortune hath pleyd a game At the chessew with me, alas, the whyle, That al behoeth and nothing halte, She goth upright and yet she halte, That bagghet foule and looketh faire, The dispraise debonarie That scorneth many a creature! An ydole of fals portraiure Is she, for she wil some wryen, She is the monster's bed y-wryen, As fifth o y-strawed with flouruses.

Myn he leO is turned into seknesse, Myn boldnesse is turned to shame, 8. The traiteresse fals and ful of gyle, That al behoeth and nothing halte, She goth upright and yet she halte, That bagghet foule and looketh faire, The dispraise debonarie That scorneth many a creature! An ydole of fals portraiure Is she, for she wil some wryen, She is the monster's bed y-wryen, As fifth o y-strawed with flouruses.

Myn he leO is turned into seknesse, Myn boldnesse is turned to shame,
And "Mabei" in mid' pointe of the chekere
With a poune erraunt, alas!
Fal craffier to play she was
Than Athalus, that made the game
First of the cheesse; so was his name.

But God wolde I had ones or twyes
Y-could and knewe the jeupardyes
That coude the Greke Pictagores,
I shulde have pleyd the bet at ches
And better as my fers fell therby.

And though whereto? For trewyly,
I hold that wish nat worth a streit? It had be never the bet for me,
For Fortune can so many a wyfe,
Ther bet be fewe can hir begyle,
And eek she is the lasse to blame;
Myslyf I wolde have do the same,
Before God, had I be as she;
She ought the more excused be,
For this I say yet more thereto.

Had I be God and mighte have do
My wille, whan she my fers caughte,
I wolde have drawe the same draughte,
For al my wille, my lust hooly
My blisse; alas, that I was borne!
For, also wis God yive me reste,
I wolde have drawe the same draughte,
With a poun erraunt,
Ful craftier to pley she was
Than Athalus, that made the game
First of the chess; so was his name.

But God wolde I had ones or twyes
Y-could and knewe the jeupardyes
That coude the Greke Pictagores,
I shulde have pleyd the bet at ches
And better as my fers fell therby.

And though whereto? For trewyly,
I hold that wish nat worth a streit? It had be never the bet for me,
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With a poun erraunt,
Ful craftier to pley she was
Than Athalus, that made the game
First of the chess; so was his name.

But God wolde I had ones or twyes
Y-could and knewe the jeupardyes
That coude the Greke Pictagores,
I shulde have pleyd the bet at ches
And better as my fers fell therby.

And though whereto? For trewyly,
I hold that wish nat worth a streit? It had be never the bet for me,
For Fortune can so many a wyfe,
Ther bet be fewe can hir begyle,
And eek she is the lasse to blame;
Myslyf I wolde have do the same,
Before God, had I be as she;
She ought the more excused be,
For this I say yet more thereto.

Had I be God and mighte have do
My wille, whan she my fers caughte,
I wolde have drawe the same draughte,
For al my wille, my lust hooly
My blisse; alas, that I was borne!
For, also wis God yive me reste,
I wolde have drawe the same draughte,
With a poun erraunt,
Ful craftier to pley she was
Than Athalus, that made the game
First of the chess; so was his name.
...
And Love, that had herd my bone, 
Had espied me thus sone; 
That she ful sone in my thought, 
As helpe me God, so was y-cought; 
No maner reed but at hir looke 
And at myn herte; forwhy hir eyen. 
So gladly, I trow, myn herte seyde; 
That purely tho myn owne thought 
Seyde it be't serve hir for hought; 
And to another be wel. 
And it was sooth, for everydey; 
I wil anonriht tell thee why. 
I saw hir daunce so comly, 
Carole and singe so sweetely, 
Laugh and pley so womanly, 
Than with another to be wel.
No maner reed but ate hir looke 
And Love, that had herd my bone, 
That dulnesseo was of hir adrad. 
Therwith hir liste so well to live, 
"By God, my wrathe is al foryivel" 
And close; for, were she never so glad, 
But ever, me thought, hir eyen seyde, 
Hir looking was nat foly sprad, 
Had made heme opene by mesure, 
It but was never the rather do. 
Have mercy, fools wenden so, 
Soothe to seyn, it was nat rede, 
That certes, I trow, that evermore 
And looke so debonairly, 
So goodly speke and so frendly 
Carole and singe so swetely, 
And it was sooth, for everydel.
That purely tho myn owne thought 
Seyde it were beta serve hir for nought, 
And at myna herte; forwhyo hir eyen 
So gladly, I trow, myn herte seyen 
That she ful sone in my thought, 
So
I saw hir daunce so comlely, 
Forgive any cause of anger! (The man in black interprets his lady's demeanor in the 
terms of courtly love, where haughtiness or anger was part of the game of aloofness that made the 
love games and bears a virtuous affectation toward all mankind.)
That ther was never yet thung hir tonge
Man ne woman greetly harmad
As for hir, ther was al harm hir,
Ne lase flatteringe in hir worde,3
That'puriely hit simple recorde5
Was founde as tresse as any honde6
Or trouthe of any mannes honde.
Ne chyde she coude never a dele.7
That knoweth at the world ful wele.
But swich a faireness of a nække8
Had that swete that boone nor brekke9
Was ther noon sene that missat.10
It was whyte, smothe, streight, and pure flat,11
Without hole12 or cake-bloom,13
As by seneing, had she noo.
Hir throte, as I have now memoire,14
Semed a round tour of yvoire,15
Of good greetesse,16 and nought too greete.17
And goode faize Whyte she hete;
That was my lady name right.18
She was bothe fair and bright;
She hadde nat hir name wronge.
Right fater shulders,19 and body longe20
She had, and armes; every liff.21
Fattish, fleshly,22 nat greet therwith;
Rounde brestes, and of good bredeo23
Hir hippes were, a streight flat bakke.24
I knew on hir noo other lakke.25
That al hir limes were pure sewinge,26
In as far as I had knowign.27
Therto28 she coude so wel pleyn,29
When thar hir liste,30 that I dar sere,
That she was lyk to torcheo bright,
That ever man may take of light.31
Ynoygh,32 and it hath never the lesse.
Of maner and of comlinesse33
Right so ferde my lady dere,
For every vight of hir manere
Might cacche34 ynoygh that he wolde;35

3. Not (anyone) more likely to speak the truth or less likely to scorn others, not (anyone) who could bring more comfort, so much that I would venture to swear by the (pope) even if it were song by the Pope (himself), that through her tongue no man or woman was ever greatly harmed. As far as I was concerned, no harm was in evidence. (The last probably means that she never slandered or spoke anything to harm others.)

4. The image of a "round tower of ivory" has its ultimate Source in the biblical Song of Solomon imagery from earlier in the poem. The color of ivory and the lady's name (Whyte, 148) are used (see my introduction to the poem).

5. That would result in her limbs being anything other than perfectly proportioned, inasmuch as I had knowledge. (The man in black here confers physical description of the lady with the extent of her beauty. The description of the lady's Whyte has followed the standard rhetorical formula of the "blazon" or "effictio," which intends female beauty from head to toe.)
She loved so wel hir owne name,
Ne, he thow sike, she wolde nat fonde
To holde no wight in balaunce
By half word ne by countenaunce,
But if men wolde upon hir lye;
Ne sende men into Walakye.

To Pruyse, and into Tartarye,
To Alsiaunde, ne into Turkye,
And bidde him faste anoon that he
go hoodless into the Drye See,
And come hoom by the Carrenare,
And saye, "Sir, be now right ware"
And seye, "Sir, be now right ware"
"Bet? Ne no wight so we!!" quod he.
"Right on this same," as I have seyde,
And seye, "Sir, be now right ware"
Ne sende men into Walakye,
To holde no wight in balaunce"
She loved so wei hir owne name.
Hir lust to hoide no wight in honde,o
For certes, O she was, that swete wyfe,
That I may of yow here seyn
She ne used no swich knakkes smale.
Worship era that ye come ageyn!
And come hoom by the Carrenare;
And bidde him faste anoon that he
That ever was in Babiloyne,
And therto had the worthinesse
In Cartage or in Macedoyne,
Though I had had al the beautee
That ever had Alcipyades
And thougho they ne had," I wolde tho
Even if I had not / then
Nede? Nay, trewly, I gabbeO now,
Nought 'nede,' and I wol telle how,
Nede? Nay, trewly, I gabbeO now,
Nought 'nede,' and I wol telle how,
For of good wille myn herte it woIde,q
For love of Polixena-
But wherfor that I telle thee
When I first my lady say?
I was right yong, sooth to say,
And ful great need I had to lerne,
"Nay, leve" it we!!" "Sir, so do I;
Believe it, sir," quod I, "pardee."
"Whoso" had looked hir with your eyen.
"With myn? Nay, alle that hir seyen
Seyde and swore it was so.
And though they ne had, I wolde tho
Have loved best my lady freeo,
Though I had had at the beautee
That ever had Alcipyades
And al at the strengthe of Ercules,
And therfo thed woulde the wiseress
Of Alsiaunde and al the richesse
That ever was in Bahliloyne,
In Cartage or in Macedoyne.

Or in Rome, or in Ninive,
And therfo also hardy be
As was Ector, so have I joye,
That Achilles slow at Troye—
And therfo was he slayn also
In a temple, for bothe two
Were slayn, he and Antiluegus,
And so seyth Dares Frigius,
For love of Poluxena:
Or ben as wys as Minerva,9
I wolde ever, without dred,6
Have loved hir, for I most nede7
Nede? Nay, trewly, I gabbe7 now,
Nought 'nede,' and I wol telle how,
And ek to love hir I was holdeo
As for the fairest and the beste.
She was as good, so have I rest,
As ever was Penelope of Grece
Or as the noble wyfe Lucrece,
That was the beste—he teleth thus,
The Romayne Tytus Livius—
She was as good, and nothing lyke,1
Though hir stories be autentyke,
Alge" she was as trewe as she,6
But wherfor that I telle thee
Who saw
I was right yong, sooth to say,
And ful great need I had to lerne,
"Nay, leve" it we!!" "Sir, so do I;
Believe it, sir," quod I, "pardee."
"Whoso" had looked hir with your eyen.
"With myn? Nay, alle that hir seyen
Seyde and swore it was so.
And though they ne had, I wolde tho
Have loved best my lady freeo,
Though I had had at the beautee
That ever had Alcipyades
And al at the strengthe of Ercules,
And therfo thed woulde the wiseress
Of Alsiaunde and al the richesse
That ever was in Bahliloyne,
In Cartage or in Macedoyne.

9. Alcibiades, the son of an Athenian general and statesman in the fifth century B.C.E., was renowned for his beauty; the mighty Heracles was legendary for his strength; for the time of his death in 322 B.C.E. at the age of thirty-three, Alexander the Great controlled an empire that reached from Greece to India; Babylon, Carthage, Magnesia, Rome, and Ninevah were all cities or regions known for their extraordinary wealth; 'hardy' (brave) Hector, slain On the hattlefield
for his beauty; the mighty Hercules was legendary for his strength; by the time of his death in 323 B.C.E.), who chose suicide rather than dishonor after being raped, and Chaucer retells it in the
reteleUng of the Trojan story by Dares Frygius; Minerva was the goddess of wisdom.

8. The locations listed are, in order, Walachia (in southern Romania), Pressia, Outer Mongolia (land
of the Tatars), Alexandria (in Egypt), Turkey, the Gold Desert (in Outer Mongolia), and the Gobi
or distantly situated on the medieval trade route to the Far East, and are here mentioned as far­
of the Tatars), Alexandria (in Egypt), Turkey, the Gobi Desert (in Outer Mongolia), and the Qara
Na'ur ("Black Lake" on the far side of the Gobi). All were areas either of Christian-Muslim conflict
away and dangerous regions, not suitable for a romantic quest. Going to any of them "nobleless"
or without head protection would be particularly foolish.
Nay, certainly, then I would be much worse than was Achitofel or Antenor, as I may have joy, the

2. No matter how painful my sorrows might be.

3. It seems to me that you are taking a chance on confession without (first) undergoing penance.

2. Nay, certainly, then I would be much worse than was Achitofel or Antenor, as I may have joy, the

3. It seems to me that you are taking a chance on confession without (first) undergoing penance.

2. No matter how painful my sorrows might be.

3. It seems to me that you are taking a chance on confession without (first) undergoing penance.

To make songs, as I best coude, And ofte tynte I songe hem loude, "Therof he took the firste soun.

5. Nay (did I) know the art as well as did Lamenec, the son of Tobul, he who first invented the craft of

composing songs, for his father's hammer rang out, going up and down on the anvil, from

his brother's hammers rang out, going up and down on the anvil, from

3. It seems to me that you are taking a chance on confession without (first) undergoing penance.

2. No matter how painful my sorrows might be.

3. It seems to me that you are taking a chance on confession without (first) undergoing penance.

2. Nay, certainly, then I would be much worse than was Achitofel or Antenor, as I may have joy, the

3. It seems to me that you are taking a chance on confession without (first) undergoing penance.
I am afraid, terrified and angry,  
Alas! What shall I threaten do?  
In this debate I was so woeful:  
Me thought I myn herte braste atweyne?  
So atte laste, sooth to seye,  
I bethought me that nature  
Ne formed never in creature  
So moche beautee, trewly,  
And bountee, without mercy.  
In hope of that, my tale I tolde  
With sorrow, as that I never shold,  
For nedes, and maugree my head,  
I moste have told hir or be deede.  
I noot wel how that I began,  
Ful evel reherse it I can;  
And eek, as helpe me God wolthe,  
I trowe in the distal,  
That was the ten woundes of Egipte,  
For many a word I overskipte  
In my tale, for pure fere  
Lest my wordes missete were.  
With sorrowful herte and woundes dede,  
Suffte and quaking for pure drede  
And shame, and stining in my tale  
For ferde, and myn heewe al pale,  
Ful ofte I wexe bothe pale and rede.  
Bowing to hir, I heng the heede,  
I durste nat oneso looke hir on,  
And myn heweo al pale,  
I seyde 'mercy,' and no more;  
So at the laste, sooth to seye,  
When that myn herte was come ayenge,  
To telle shortly al my speche,  
My lady yaf me al hooly  
And worshipo and to kepe hir nameO  
Whan I had owrong and she the right,  
As helpe me God, I was as blyveo  
Of aile happeso the alderbeste,  
Glad, that is no need to axe!  
And that, which I yaf unto hir  
For trewly, that swete wight,  
Reysed as froo deeth to IyveO  
And therwith she yaf me a ringe;  
My lady yaf me al hoolyO  
And worshipo and to kepe hir nameO  
For trewly Cassandra, that so  
Bewalled the destruction  
Of Troy and of Ilioun,  
Had never swich sorrow as I tho.  
To doO hir knowe and understande  
My wo; and she wel understood  
That I ne wilned nothing but godde  
And worshipo and to kepe hir nameO  
Of al thing, and dede hir shame,  
And was so besyo hir to serve;  
And was so besyo hir to serve;  
And pitee sholde I shulde serve,  
Sith that I wilned noon harrme ywis.  
So whan my lady knewe all this,  
My lady yaf me al hooely  
Gave unreservedly  
The noble yfteO of hir mercy,  
SavingO hir worshop by al weyes;  
Dreelles,' I mere noon other weyes.  
And therwith she yaf me a ringe;  
I trewe it was the firste thinge  
That myn herte was y-waxeO  
Glad, that is no need to axe!  
AsO helpe me God, I was as hylveO  
Reysed as froo deeth to IyveO  
Of alle happesO the alderbeste,  
The gladdest and the moste at reste.  
For trewly, that sweete wight,  
A lady of the Trojan palace, whose prophecy of Troy's destruction was deemed to be ignored. Her lament over the fall of Troy is included in medieval versions of the story by Guido delle Colonna and Bonito de Sainte Maure: Ilioun (for Latin "Heliou") was the citadel in Troy; see also the Legend of Good Women 936, and the House of Feme 158.  
And it would have been a pity if I wree to the since I truly meant no harm.
She wolde alwey so goodely* pleasingly, courteously
Foryeve* me so debonairely.*
In al my youth, in al chaunce,*
She took me in her governance,*
Therwith* she was alwey so trewe,*
Our joye was ever yliche newe,*
That never nas that oon* contraire
To that other, for no wo,*
For soothe,* yliche* they suffred tho*
O* blise and ek o sorne* bothe;
Yliche* they were bothe gladd and wrothe.*
Al was us oon,* withoute were.*
And thus we lived ful many a yere
So wel, I can nat telle how.*
"Sir," quod I, "where is she now?"
"Now?" quod he, and stinte anoon.*
Therewith* he wex* as deed as stoon,
And seyde, "Alias that I was bore!* that was the los* that herbifore I tolde thee that I had lome.*
Bethinke* how I seyde herbifore,
Thou wost fullitel* what thou menestj
I have lost more than thou wenest.
"Alias, sir, how? What may that be?"
"She is deed." "Nay!" "Yis, by my trouthe."*