THE COLLEGE CHAUCER

EDITED BY

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THE BOOKE OF THE DUCHESSE

I have grete wonder, be this lyghte,
How that I lyve, for day ne nyghte
I may nat slepe wel nygh noght,
I have so many an ydel thoght
Purely for defaullte of slepe,
That by my trouthe I take no kepe
Of noo thinge, how hyt cometh or gooth,
Ne me nys nothyng ye leve nor looth.
Al is ylyche goode to me,
Joy or sorowe, wherso hyt be,
For I have felynge in no thynge,
But as yt were a mased thynge
Alway in poyn to falle a-doun,
For sorwful ymagynacioun
Ys alway holy in my mynde.
And wel ye woote, agaynes kynde
Hyt were to lyven in thys wyse,
For Nature wolde nat suffye
To noon erthely creature
Nat longe tyme to endure
Without slepe, and be in sorwe.
And I ne may, no nyght ne morwe,
Slepe, and thys melancolye
And drede I have for to dye,
Defaullte of slepe, and levynesse,
Hath sleyne my spirite of quyknesse,
That I have loste al lustyhede.
Suche fantasies ben in myn hede,
So I not what is best too doo.
But men myght axe me, why soo
I may not sleepe, and what me is?

26 aleyne om. Lines 31-46 are written in this MS. in a hand of perhaps 1500.
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But natheles, whoe aske this
Leseth his asking trewely.
Myselven can not telle why
The southe, but trewly, as I gesse,
I holde it be a sicknes
That I have suffred this eight yeere;
And yet my boote is never the nere,
For there nis phisicien but one
That may me heale, but that is done.
Passe we over untill efte;
That will not be, mote nedes be lefte.
Our first mater is good to kepe.
Soe when I sawe I might not slepe
Til now late, this other night,
Upon my bedde I sate upright,
And bade one reche me a booke,
A romaunce, and it me tok
To rede, and drive the night away;
For me thought it better play
Then playen either at chesse or tables.
And in this boke were written fables
That clerkes had in olde tyme,
And other poets, put in rime
To rede, and for to be in minde,
While men loved the lawe of kinde.
This boke ne speake, but of such things,
Of quenes lives, and of kingses,
And many other thinges smalle.
Amonge all this, I fonde a tale
That me thought a wonder thing.
This was the tale: There was a king
That hight Seyes, and had a wife
The beste that might beare lyfe,
And this quene hight Alcyone.

82 nathles. 83 trewly. 84 tell. 85 hold. 89 is. 51 play. 56 of in.
58 kings 59 things. 64 best.
Soe it bess, thereafter soone,
This king wol wenden over see.
To telen shortly, whan that he
Was in the see, thus in this wise,
Soche a tempest gan to rise
That brake her maste and made it fal,
And cleft ther ship, and dreint hem all,
That never was founden, as it telles,
Borde, ne man, ne nothing elles.
Right thus this king Seyes loste his life.
Now for to speaken of his wife,
This lady, that was left at home,
Hath wonder, that the king ne come
Home, for it was a longe terme.
Anone her herte began to erme,
And for that her thought evermo
It was not wele he dwelled soe,
She longed soe after the king
That certes, it were a pitous thing
To tell her hertely sorrowfull life
That had, allass, this noble wife,
For him she loved alderbeste.
Anone she sent bothe eeste and weste
To seke him, but they founde nought.
"Alas!" (quoth shee) "that I was wroght!
And wher my lord, my love, be deed?
Certes I will never eate breede,
I make a vowe to my god here,
But I mowe of my lord here."
Soche sorowe this lady to her toke
That trewly I, which made this booke,
Had suche pittee and suche rowthe
To rede hir sorwe, that by my trowthe
I ferde the worse al the morwe
Aftir, to thenken on hir sorwe.
So whan this lady koude here noo worde
That no man myghte fynde hir lorde,
Ful ofte she swouned, and sayed alas!
For sorwe ful nygh woode she was,
Ne she koude no rede but oon,
But doune on knees she sate anoon,
And weep that pittee was to here.
"A! mercy! swete lady dere!"
Quod she to Juno, hir goddesse;
"Helpe me out of thys distresse,
And yeve me grace my lord to se
Soone, or wete wher so he be,
Or how he fareth, or in what wise,
And I shal make yowe sacrificise,
And hooly youres become I shal
With good wille, body, hert, and al.
And but thow wilte this, lady swete,
Sende me grace to slepe, and mete
In my slepe somme certeyn sweven,
Wher-thorgh that I may knowe even
Whethir my lorde be quyke or ded."
With that worde she henge doun the hed,
And felle a-swowne as colde as ston.
Hyr women kaught hir up anoon,
And broghten hir in bed al naked;
And she, forweped and forwaked,
Was wery, and thus the dede slepe
Fil on hir, or she tooke kepe,
Throgh Juno that had herde hir bone,
That made hir to slepe sone,
For as she prayede ryght so was done
In dede, for Juno ryght anone
Called thus hir messagere
To doo hir erande, and he come nere.
Whan he was come she bad hym thus,
"Go bet," quod Juno, "to Morpheus—
Thou knowest hym wel, the god of slepe—
Now understonde wel, and take kepe,
Sey thus on my halfe, that he
Go faste into the grete se,
And byd hym, that on alle thynge,
He take up Seys body the kynge,
That lyeth ful pale and no thynge rody.
Byd hym crepe into the body
And doo hit goon to Alcione,
The quene, ther she lyeth allone,
And shewe hir shortly, hit ys no nay,
How hit was dreynt thys other day;
And do the body speke soo
Ryght as hyt was woned to doo,
The whiles that hit was a-lyve.
Goo now faste, and hye the blyve.''
This messager toke leve, and went
Upon hys wey, and never ne stent
Til he come to the derke valey
That stant betwexe roches twey,
Ther never yet grew corne ne gras,
Ne tre, ne nothyng that oughte was,
 Beste, ne man, ne nothyng elles,
Save ther were a fewe welles
Came rennynge fro the clyffes adoun
That made a dedely slepynge soun,
And ronnen doun ryght by a cave,
That was under a rokke ygrave,
Amydde the valey, wonder depe,
There these goddys lay and slepe,
Morpheus and Eclypasteyre,
That was the god of slepes eyrè,
THE BOOKE OF THE DUCHESSE

That slepe and did noon other werke.
This cave was also as derke
As belle pitte, over al aboute,
They had good leyser for to route,
To envye who myght slepe beste;
Somme henge her chyn upon hir breste,
And slept upryght, hir hed yhedde,
And somne lay naked in her bedde,
And slepe, whiles the dayes laste.
This messager come flynge faste,
And cried, "O how! a-wake anoon!"
Hit was for noght, there herde hym non.
"Awake," quod he, "whoo ys, lythe there?"
And blew his horne ryght in here eere,
And cried, "awaketh!" wonder hye.
This god of slepe with hys on ye
Caste up, and axed, "who clepeth there?"
"Hyt am I!" quod this messagere,
"Juno bad thow shuldest goon"
And tolde hym what he shulde doon,
As I have tolde yow here to-fore,
Hyt ys no nede reherse hyt more;
And went hys wey whan he had sayede.
Anoon this god of slepe abrayede
Out of hys slepe, and gan to goon,
And dyd as he had bede hym doon,
Tooke up the dreynthe body sone,
And bare hyt forth to Alcion,
Hys wife the quene, ther as she lay,
Ryght even a quarter before day;
And stood ryght at hys beddys fete,
And called hir ryght as she hete,
By name, and sayede, "My swete wyfe,
Awake, let be your sorwful lyfe,
For in your sorwe there lyth no rede,

182 heere. 195 dreynt. 196 Alchione.
For certes, swete, I nam but dede,
Ye shul me never on lyve yse.
But good swete herte, look that ye
Bury my body, for suche a tyde
Ye mowe hyt fynde, the see besyde;
And farewell, swete, my worldes blysse!
I praye God youre sorwe lysse;—
To lytel while oure blysse lasteth!"
With that hir eyen up she casteth,
And sawe noght. "Allas!" quod she for sorwe,
And deyede within the thriddle morwe.
But what she sayede more in that swoye
I may not telle yow as nowe,
Hyt were to longe for to dwelle,
My first matere I wil yow telle,
Wherfore I have tolde this thynge
Of Alcione and Seys the kynge.
For thus moche dar I saye welle,
I had be dolven everydelle,
And ded ryght thorg h defaulte of slepe,
Yif I ne had redde and take kepe
Of this tale next before.
And I wol telle yow wherfore;
For I ne myght, for bote ne bale,
Slepe or I had redde thys tale
Of this dreynyte Seys the kynge,
And of the goddis of slepynge.
When I had redde thys tale wel,
And over loked hyt everydel,
Me thoght wonder yf hit were so;
For I had never herde speke or tho
Of noo goddis that koude make
Men to slepe, ne for to wake,
For I ne knewe never God but oon.
And in my game I sayede anoon—
And yet me lyst ryght eve to ply—
"Rather then that y shulde dey
Thorgh defaulte of slepyng thus,
I wolde yive thilke Morpheus
Or hys goddesse, dame Juno,
Or somme wight ellis, I ne roght who,
To make me slepe and have some reste,
I wil yive hym the alderbeste
Yifte, that ever he abode hys lyve,
And here, on warde, ryght now, as blyve;
Yif he wol make me slepe a lyte,
Of downe of pure dowves white
I wil yif hym a feder bedde,
Rayed with golde and ryght wel cledde
In fyne blak satyn de owter mere,
And many a pelowe, and every bere
Of clothe of Reynes to slepe softe,
Hym thar not nede to turnen ofte;
And I wol yive hym al that fallys
To a chambre, and al hys hallys
I wol do peynte with pure golde,
And tapite hem ful many folde
Of oo sute, this shal he have,
Yf I wiste where were hys cave,
Yf he kan make me slepe sone,
As did the goddesse quene Alcione;
And thus this ylke god Morpheus
May wynne of me moo fees thus,
Than ever he wanne, and to Juno
That ys hys goddesse I shal soo do,
I trow, that she shal holde hir payede."
I hadde unneth that worde y-sayede,
Ryght thus I have tolde hyt yow,
That sodeynly, I nyste how,
Suche a luste anoon me tooke
To slepe, that ryght upon my booke
Y fil aslepe, and therwith evene
Me mette so ynyly swete a svevene,
So wonderful, that never yitte
Y trowe no man had the wytte
To konne wel my sweven rede;
No, not Joseph, withoute drede,
Of Egipte, ho that red so
The kynges metynge, Pharao;
No more than koude the lest of us,
Ne nat skarsly Macrobeus—
He that wrote al thavysyoun,
That he mette, kynge Scipioun,
The noble man, the Affrikan,
Swiche mervayles fortuned than—
I trowe, a-rede my dremes even.
Loo, thus hyt was, thys was my sweven.
Me thoghte thus: that hyt was May,
And in the dawenyng I lay,
Me mette thus, in my bed al naked,
And loked forth, for I was waked
With smale foules a grete hepe,
That had affrayed me out of slepe
Thorgh noyse and swettenesse of her songe.
And as me mette, they sate a-monge
Upon my chambre roofe wythoute,
Upon the tyles over al aboute,
And songen everych in hys wyse,
The moste solempe servise,
By noote, that ever man, y trowe,
Had herde, for somme of hem songe lowe,
Somme high, and al of oon acorde.
To telle shortly, att oo worde,
Was never harde so swete a steven,
The Booke of the Duchesse

But hyt had be a thynge of heven,
So mery a soune, so swete entewaynes;
That certes, for the toune of Tewnes,
I nolde but I had herde hem syngle,
For al my chambre gan to rynge
Thorogh syngynge of her armonyne.
For instrument nor melodye
Was nowhere herde yet halfe so swete,
Nor of acorde halfe so mete;
For ther was noon of hem that feyned
To syngle, for ech of hem hym peyned
To fynde out mery crafty notys,
They ne spared not her throtys.
And soothe to seyn, my chambre was
Ful wel depeytent, and with glas
Were al the wyndowes wel yglysyt
Ful clere, and nat an hoole ycrasyd,
That to beholde hyt was grete joye.
For holie al the storye of Troye
Was in the glasyng yevrogit thus,
Of Ector and of kynge Priamus,
Of Achilles and Lamedoun
And eke of Medea and of Jasoun,
Of Paris, Eleyne, and of Lavynye.
And alle the wallys with colouris fyne
Were peynted, bothe text, and glose,
And al the Ramouns of the Rose.
My wyndowes were sette echon,
And throgh the glas the sonne shon
Upon my bed with bryghte bemyss,
With many glade gilde stremsys,
And eke the welken was so faire,
Blew, bryght, clere was the ayre,
And ful attempre, for sothe, hyt was,
For nother to colde nor hoote yt nas,
Ne in al the welkene was a clowde.
And as I lay thus, wonder lowde
Me thoght I herde an hunte blowe.

Tassay hys horne, and for to knowe
Whether hyt were clere or horse of soune.
And I herde goynge bothe up and doune

Men, hors, houndes, and other thynge,
And al men speken of huntynge,

How they wolde slee the hert, with strengthe,
And how the hert had upon lengthe,
So moche embosed, y not now what.
Anoon, ryght when I herde that,

How that they wolde on huntynge goon,
I was ryght glad, and up anoon
Tooke my hors and forthe I went

Out of my chambre, I never stent
Til I come to the felde withoute.

Ther overtoke y a grete route

Of huntes and eke of foresterys,
With many relays and lymerys,
And hyed hem to the forest faste,
And I with hem; so at the laste

I asked oon, ladde a lymere,
“Say, felowe, whoo shal hunte here?”

Quod I, and he answered ageyn,
“Syr, themperour Octovyen,”

Quod he, “and ys here faste by.”
“A Goddys halfe, in goode tyme,” quod I,

“Go we faste!” and gan to ryde,
When we came to the forest syde,
Every man didde ryght anoon

As to huntynge fille to doon.
The mayster hunte anoon, fote hote,

With a grete horne blewe thre mote
At the uncoupylynge of hys houndys.
THE BOOKE OF THE DUCHESSE

Withynne a while the herte founde ys,
Ihalowed, and rechased faste
Longe tyme, and so at the laste
This hert rused, and staale away
Fro alle the houndes a prevy way.
The houndes had overshette hem alle,
And were on a defaulte yfalle.
Therwyth the hunte wonder faste
Blewe a forleygnye at the laste.
I was go walked fro my tree,
And as I went, ther came by mee
A whelpe, that fauned me as I stoode,
That hadde yfolowed, and koude no goode.
Hyt come and crepte to me as lowe,
Ryght as hyt had me yknowe,
Hylde doun hys hede, and joyned hys erys,
And leyde al smothe doun hys herys.
I wolde have kaught hyt, and anoon
Hyt fled, and was fro me goon;
And I hym folwed, and hyt forthe went
Doune by a floury grene went
Ful thikke of gras ful softe and swete,
With flourys fele, faire under fete,
And litel used hyt semed thus,
For both Flora and Zephirus,
They two that make floures growe,
Had made her dwellynge ther, I trowe,
For hit was, on to beholde,
As thogh therthe enve wolde
To be gayer than the heven,
To have moo floures, swche' seven
As in the wolkene sterris bee.
Hyt had forgete the povertee
That wynter, thorgh hys colde morwes,

383 hem hym. 384 upon. 409 walkene.
'See Glossary.
Had made hyt suffre, and his sorwes;
All was forgeten, and that was sene,
For al the woode was waxen grene,
Swetnesse of dewe had made hyt waxe.
Hyt ys no nede eke for to axe
Where there were many grene greves,
Or thikke of trees so ful of leves,
And every tree stoode by hym selve
Fro other wel tene fete or twelve.
So grete trees, so huge of strengthe,
Or fourty, fifty fedme lengthe,
Clene withoute bowgh or stikke,
With croppes brode, and eke as thikke,
They were nat an ynche asonder,
That hit was shadewe over al under,
And many an herte and many an hynde
Was both before me and be-hynde.
Of founes, sowres, bukses, does,
Was ful the woode, and many roes
And many sqwireles that sete
Ful high upon the trees and ete,
And in hir maner made festys.
Shortly, hyt was so ful of bestys,
That thogh Argus, the noble counter,
Sete to rekene in hys counter,
And rekene with his figuris ten—
For by tho figuris mowe al ken
Yf they be crafty, rekene and noumbre,
And tel of every thinge the noumbre—
Yet shulde he fayle to rekene evene
The wondres, me mette in my swevne.
But forth they romed ryght wonder faste
Doune the woode, so at the laste
I was war of a man in blak,
That sete and had yturned his bak
To an ooke, an huge tree.
"Lorde," thoghth I, "who may that be?
What ayleth hym to sitten here?"
Anoon ryght I wente nere;
Than founde I sitte even upryght,
A wonder wel-farynge knyght—
By the maner me thoghte soo
Of good mochel, and ryght yonge therto,
Of the age of foure and twenty yere.
Upon hys berde but lytel here,
And he was clothed al in Blake.
I stalked even unto hys bake,
And ther I stoode as stille as ought,
That, soth to saye, he sawe me nought,
For why, he henge hys hede adoune,
And with a dedely sorwful soune
He made of ryme ten vers or twelphe,
Of a compleynt to hymselfe,
The moste pitee, the moste rowthe,
That ever I herde, for, by my trowthe,
Hit was gret wonder that nature
Myght suffre any creature
To have suche sorwe, and be not ded,
Ful petouse, pale, and nothynge red.
He sayed a lay, a maner songe,
Withoute noote, withoute songe,
And was thys, for ful wel I kan
Reherse hyt; ryght thus hyt began.—

The Lay.

"I have of sorwe so grete wone
That joye gete I never none,
Now that I see my lady bryght,
Which I have loved with al my myght,
Is fro me ded, and ys a-goon."
Allas, dethe, what ayleth the?
That thou holdest have taken me
  Whan thou toke my lady swete,
That was so faire, so freshe, so fre,
So goode, that men may wel se
  Of al goodenesse she had no mete!"

Whan he had made thus his complaynte,
Hys sorwful hert gan faste faynte,
And his spiritis wexen dede.
The bloode was fled, for pure drede,
Doune to hys hert, to make hym warme,
For wel hyt feled the hert had harme,
To wete eke why hyt was adrad
By kynde, and for to make hyt glad;
For hit ys membre principal
Of the body; and that made al
Hys hewe chaunge and wexe grene
And pale, for ther noo bloode ys sene
In no maner lym of hys.
Anoon therwith whan y sawgh this,
He ferde thus evel there he sete,
I went and stoode ryght at his fete,
And grette hym; but he spake noght,
But argued with his oune thoght,
And in hys wytte disputed faste
Why and how hys lyfe myght laste;
Hym thought hys sorwes were so smerte
And lay so colde upon hys herte;
So throgh hys sorwes and hevy thoght
Made hym that he herde me noght,
For he had wel nygh loste hys mynde,
Thogh Pan, that men clepe god of kynde,
  for hys sorwes never so wrothe;
  t the last, to sayn ryght sothe,
He was war of me, how y stoode
Before hym, and did of myn hoode,
And had ygret hym as I best koude,
Debonayrly, and no thyng lowde.
He sayde, "I prey the, be not wrothe,
I herde the not, to seyn the sothe,
Ne I sawgh the not, syr, trewely."
"A, good sir, no fors," quod y,
"I am ryght sory yif I have oughte
Destroubled yow out of youre thoughte;
Foryive me, yif I have mystake."
"Yis, thamendys is lyght to make,"
Quod he, "for ther lyeth noon therto;
There ys no thynge myssayde nor do."
Loo, how goodely spake thys knyghte,
As hit had be another wyghte;
He made hyt nouther towgh ne queynte.
And I sawe that, and gan me aqueynt
With hym, and fonde hym so trestable,
Ryght wonder skylful and resonable,
As me thoght, for al hys bale.
Anoon-ryght I gan fynde a tale
To hym, to loke wher I myght oughte
Have more knowynge of hys thoughte.
"Sir," quod I, "this game is doon;
I holde that this hert be goon;
These huntyss konne hym nowher see."
"Y do no fors therof," quod he,
"My thought ys thereon never a dele."
"Be oure Lorde," quod I, "y trow yow wele;
Ryght so me thenketh byoure chere.
But sir, oo thyng wol ye here?
Me thynketh, in grete sorowe I yow see;
But certys, good sir, yif that yee
Wolde oughte discure me youre woo,
I wolde, as wys God helpe me soo,
Amende hyt, yif I kan or may.
Ye mowe preve hyt be assay.
For by my trouthe, to make yow hool
I wol do alle my power hool.
And telleth me of your sorwes smerte,
Paraventure hyt may ease youre herte,
That semeth ful seke under your syde."
With that he loked on me asyde
As who sayth, "nay, that wol not be."
"Graunt mercy, goode frende," quod he,
"I thanke the that thow woldest soo,
But hyt may never the rather be doo.
No man may my sorwe glade,
That maketh my hewe to fal and fade,
And hath myn understondynge lorne,
That me ys woo that I was borne!
May noght make my sorwes slyde
Nought al the remedyes of Ovyde;
Ne Orpheus, god of melodye,
Ne Dedalus, with his playes slye,
Ne hele me may noo phisicien,
Noght Ypocras, ne Galyen.
Me ys woo that I lyve oures twelve,
But whoo so wol assay hymselfe,
Whether his hert kan have pitee
Of any sorwe, lat hym see me.
Y wreach, that deth hath made al naked
Of al blysse that ever was maked,
Y worthe worste of alle wyghtys,
That hate my dayes and my nyghtys;
My lyfe, my lustes, be me loothe,
For al welfare and I be wroothe.
The pure deth ys so ful myfoo,

578 al.
That I wolde deye, hyt wolde not soo.
For whan I folwe hyt, hit wol flee,
I wolde have hym, hyt nyl nat me. 585
This ys my peyne, wythoute rede,
Alway deynge and be not dede,
That Thesiphus, that lyeth in helle,
May not of more sorwe telle.
And who so wiste alle, be my trouthe,
My sorwe, but he hadde rowthe
And pitte of my sorwes smerte,
That man hath a fendely herte.
For who so seethe me firste on morwe
May seyn, he hath mette with sorwe,
For y am Sorwe, and Sorwe ys y. 595
Allas! and I wol tel the why,
My sorowe ys turned to pleyntyngye,
And al my lawghtre to wepyngye,
My glade thoghtys to hevynesse,
In travayle ys myn ydelenesse,
And eke my reste, my wele is woo,
My goode ys harme, and ever-moo
In wrathe ys turned my pleynte,
And my delyte into sorwynte. 600
Myn hele ys turned into sekenesse,
In drede ys al my sykernesse,
To derke ys turned al my lyghte,
My wytte ys foly, my day ys nyghte,
My love ys hate, my slepe wakyngye, 610
My merthe and meles ys fastynge,
My countenaunce ys nycete,
And al abawed, where so I be.
My pees in pleyntyngye and in werre—
Allas, how myght I fare werre! 615
My boldenesse ys turned to shame,
For fals Fortune hath pleyde a game
Atte the chesse with me, allas, the while!
The trayteresse fals, and ful of gyle,
That al behoteth, and no thyng halte,
She gethe upryght and yet she is halte,
That baggeth foule and loketh faire,
The dispitouse debonaire,
That skorneth many a creature;
An ydole of fals portrayure
Ys she, for she wol sone wrien,
She is the monstres hed ywrien,
As fylthe over ystrawed with flouris.
Hir moste worshippe and hir flour ys
To lyen, for that ys hyr nature,
Withoute feythe, lawe, or mesure;
She ys fals; and ever lawghynge
With one yghe, and that other wepyng;
That ys broght up she sette al doun,
I lykne hyr to the scorpion,
That ys a fals flaterynge beste,
For with his hede he maketh feste,
But al amydde hys flaterynge,
With hys tayle hyt wol styngne,
And envenyme, and so wol she.
She ys thenvyouse charite
That ys ay fals, and semeth wele,
So turneth she hyr false whele
Aboute, for hyt ys nothyng stable,
Now by the fire, now at table,
For many oon hath she thus yblent.
She ys pley of enchauntement,
That semeth oon and ys not soo;
The false thefe, what hath she doo,
west thou? by oure Lorde, I wol the sey.

wrien varien. 627 mowstres. 643 fals. 646 thus she. 649 fals.
At the chesse with me she gan to pleye;
With hir false draughtes dyvers
She staale on me, and toke my fers.
And whan I sawgh my fers away,
Allas, I kouthe no lenger play,
But seyde, 'farewel, swete, ywys,
And fare-wel al that ever ther ys!'
Therwith Fortune seyde, 'chek here,
And mate in the myd poynpt of the chekkere'
With a poune errante, allas!
Ful craftier to pley she was
Than Athalus, that made the game
First of the chesse, so was hys name;
But God wolde I had, oones or twyes,
Ykoude and knowe the jeupardyes
That koude the Greke Pictagoras;
I shulde have pleyde the bet at ches,
And kept my fers the bet therby,
And thogh, wherto? for trewely
I holde that wysshe nat worthe a stree;
Hyt had be never the bet for me.
For Fortune kan so many a wyle,
Ther be but fewe kan hir begile,
And eke she ys the lasse to blame;
My selfe I wolde have do the same,
Before God, hadde I be as she;
She oght the more excused be.
For this I say yet more therto,
Had I be God and myghte have do
My wille, whan my fers she kaught,
I wolde have drawe the same draught.
For also wys God yive me reste,
I dar wel swere she tooke the beste!

653 fals. 659 thoght; trewely. 676 hadde as. 680 she my fers. 688 he.
My blysse, alas, that I was borne!
For evermore, y trowe trewly,
For al my wille, my luste holly
Ys turned, but yet, what to doone?
Be oure lorde, hyt ys to deye soone,
For no thynge I leve hyt noght,
But lyve and deye ryght in this thoght.
For there nys planete in firmament,
Ne in ayre, ne in erthe noon element,
That they ne yive me a yyte echon
Of wepynge, whan I am allon.
For whan that I avise me wel,
And bethenke me every del,
How that ther lyeth in rekenynge
Inne my sorwe for no thynge;
And how ther levyth noe gladnesse
May gladde me of my distresse,
And how I have loste suffisance,
And thereto I have no plesance,
Than may I say, I have ryght noght.
And whan al this falleth in my thoght,
Allas, than am I overcome!
For that ys doon ys not to come.
I have more sorowe than Tantale.”
And whan I herde hym tel thys tale
This pitously, as I yow telle,
Unnethe myght y lenger duelle,
Hyt dyd myn hert so moche woo.
“A, goode sir!” quod I, “say not soo!
Have somme pitee on your nature
That formed yow to creature,
Remembre yow of Socrates,
For he ne counted nat thre strees
Of noght that Fortune koude doo.”

701 glad.
"No," quod he, "I kan not soo."
"Why so, good syr? parde," quod y, 720
"Ne, say noght soo for trewely,
Thogh ye had loste the ferses twelve,
And ye for sorwe mordred yourselfe,
Ye sholde be dampned in this cas
By as goode ryght as Medea was,
That slowgh hir children for Jasoun,
And Phyllis also for Demophoun
Henge hirselfe, so weylaway!
For he had broke his terme day
To come to hir; another rage 780
Had Dydo, the quene eke of Cartage,
That slough hirselfe, for Eneas
Was fals, which a foole she was!
And Ecquo died for Narcisus
Nolde nat love hir, and ryght thus 785
Hath many another foly doon.
And for Dalida died Sampson
That slough hymselfe with a pilere.
But ther is no man alyve here
Wolde for a fers make this woo!"

"Why so?" quod he, "hyt ys nat soo,
Thou woste ful lytel what thou menyst,
I have loste more than thow wenyst."
"Loo, sir, how may that be," quod y,
"Good sir, telle me al hooly
In what wyse, how, why, and wherefore
That ye have thus youre blysse lore."
"Blythely," quod he, "come sytte adoun,
I telle the up condicioun
That thou shalt hooly with al thy wytte
Doo thynt entent to herkene hitte."
"Yis, syr." "Swere thy trouthe therto."

720 yis parde. 721 say om.; trewly. 744 sir how she that may.
740 hyt the up a.
“Gladly.” “Do thanne holde hereto.”
“I shal ryght blythely, so God me save,
Hooly, with al the witte I have,
Here yow, as wel as I kan.”
“A Goddys halfe,” quod he, and began;
“Syr,” quod he, “sith firste I kouthe
Have any maner wytte fro youthe,
Or kyndely understondynge
To comprehende, in any thynge,
What love was in myn oune wytte,
Dredeles I have ever yitte
Be tributarye, and yive rente
To Love hooly with goode entente,
And throgh plesaunce become his thralle,
With good wille, body, hert, and alle.
Al this I putte in his servage
As to my lorde, and did homage,
And ful devoutely I prayed hym to,
He shulde besette myn herte so,
That hyt plesance to hym were,
And worshippe to my lady dere.
And this was longe and many a yere
Or that myn herte was set owhere,
That I did thus, and nyste why,
I trowe hit came me kyndely,
Peraventure I was theruto moste able
As a white walle or a table;
For hit ys redy to cachche and take
Al that men wil theryn make,
Whethir so men wil portrey or peynte,
Be the werkes never so queynte.
And thilke tyme I ferde ryght so
I was able to have lerned tho,
And to have kende as wel or better,

756 here to. 771 hert. 788 peynt. 788 queynt.
THE BOOKE OF THE DUCHESSE

Paraunter, other arte or lettre;
But for love came firste in my thoght,
Therfore I forgate hyt nought.
I ches love to my firste crafte,
Therfore hit ys with me lafte;
For why, I toke hyt of so yonge age,
That malyce had my corage
Nat that tyme turned to nothynge
Thorgh to mochel knowlachynge.
For that tyme Yowthe, my maistresse,
Governed me in ydelenesse,
For hyt was in my firste youthe,
And thoo ful lytel goode y couthe;
For al my werkes were flytyngne
That tyme, and al my thoght varyingne,
Al were to me ylyche goode
That I knewe thoo, but thus hit stoode.
Hit happed, that I came on a day
Into a place, ther that I say
Trewly the fayrest companye
Off ladyes, that evere man with ye
Had seen togedres in oo place.
Shal I clepe hyt happer other grace
That broght me there? nay, but Fortune,
That ys to lyen ful comune,
The fals trayteresse pervers!
God wolde I koude clepe hir wers,
For now she worcheth me ful woo,
And I wol tel sone why soo;
Amonge these ladyes thus echon,
Soth to seyne, sawgh y oon
That was lyke noon of the route;
For I dar swere, withoute doute,
That as the somerys sonne bryghte

790 first. 798 first. 817 y sawgh.
Ys fairer, clerer, and hath more lyghte
Than any other planete in hevene,
The moone, or the sterres sevne,
For al the wordle, so had she
Surmountede hem al of beaute,
Of maner, and of comelynesse,
Of stature, and of wel sette gladnesse,
Of godelyhede so wel besey;
Shortly what shal y more sey?
By God, and by his halwes twelve
Hyt was my swete, ryght al hir selve!
She had so stedfaste countenaunce,
So noble port, and meyntenaunce;
And Love, that had wel herd my Boone, 835
Had espyed me thus soone,
That she ful sone, in my thoght,
As helpe me God, so was y-kaught
So sodenly, that I ne toke
No maner counseyl, but at hir loke,
And at myn hert; for why, hir eyen
So gladly, I trow, myn herte seyen,
That purely tho myn oune thoght
Seyde hit were beter serve hir for noght
Than with another to be wel.
And hyt was sothe, for everedel
I wil anoon-ryght telle the why:
I sawgh hyr daunce so comeely,
Carole and synge so swevely,
Lawghe and pley so womanly,
And loke so debonairly,
So goodely speke, and so frendly,
That certes y trowe, that evermore
Nas seyne so blysful a tresore.

827 of so. 828 and so. 839 more om. 830 His om. 840 And But; hert hest. 853 so a.
THE BOOKE OF THE DUCHESSE

For every heer on hir hede,
Soth to seyne, hyt was not rede,
Ne nouther yelowe, ne broune hyt nas,
Me thoghthe most lyke gold hyt was
And which eyen my lady hadde!
Debonair, goode, glade, and sadde,
Symple, of goode mochel, noght to wyde;
Therto hir looke nas not asyde
Ne overthwert, but besette so wele
Hyt drewh and tooke up, everydele,
Al that on hir gan beholde.
Hir eyen semed anoon, she wolde
Have mercy—foollys wenden soo,
But hyt was never the rather doo!
Hyt nas no countrefeted thynge,
Hyt was hir oune pure lokynge,
That the goddesse, Dame Nature,
Had made hem opene by mesure
And cloos; for were she never so glad,
Hyr lokynge was not foly sprad,
Ne wildely, thogh that she pleyde;
But ever me thoghth hir eyen seyde
'Be God, my wrathe ys al foryive!'
Therwith hir lyste so wel to lyve,
That dulnesse was of hir adrad;
She nas to sobre, ne to glad.
In alle thynges more mesure
Had never, I trow, creature.
But many oon with hire loke she herte,
And that sate hyr ful lytel at herte.
For she knewe nothynge of her thoghth,
But whither she knew, or knew it nowght,
Algate she ne rought of hem a stree.
To gete hyr love noo nerre was he

857 thoghth; gold om. 882-3 hert. 884 knowe.
That woned at home, than he in Ynde;
The formest was alway behynde.
But goode folke over al other
She loved, as man may do hys brother,
Of whiche love she was wounder large
In skilful placis that bere charge.

But which a visage had she thertoo!

Allas, myn hert ys wonder woo
That I ne kan discryven hyt!
Me lakketh both Englyssh and wit
For to undo hyt at the fulle;
And eke my spiritis be so dulle
So grete a thynge for to devyse.
I have no witte that kan suffise
To comprehende hir beaute,
But thus moche dar I sayn, that she
Was rody, fressh, and lyvely hewed;
And every day hir beaute newed,
And negh hir face was alderbest;
For certys Nature had swich lest
To make that faire, that trewly she
Was hir chefe patrone of beaute,
And chefe ensample of al hir werke,
And moustre; for, be hyt never so derke,
Me thynkyth I se hir evermoo.
And yet moreover, thogh al thoo
That ever levede were now alyve,
Ne sholde ha founde to diskryve
Yn al hir face a wikked sygne,
For hit was sad, symple, and benygne.

And which a goodely softe speche
Had that swete, my lyves leche,
So frendely, and so wel ygrounded,
Up al resoun so wel yfounded,

888 than that. 890 good. 904 white rody.
And so tretable to al goode,
That I dar swere wel by the roode
Of eloquence was never founde
So swete a sownynge facounde,
Ne trewer tonged, ne skorned lasse,
Ne bet koude hele, that by the masse
I durste swere, thogh the Pape hit songe,
That ther was never yet throgh hir tonge
Man ne woman gretely harmed.
As for hir, hit was al harme hyd;
Ne lasse flaterynge in hir word,
That purely hir symple recorde
Was founde as trewe as any bonde
Or trouthe of any mannys honde.
Ne chyde she koude never a dele,
That knoweth al the worlde ful wele.
But swiche a fairenesse of a nekke
Had that swete, that boon nor brekke
Nas ther non seen that mys-satte.
Hyt was white, smothe, streght, and pure flatte,
Wythouten hole; or canel-boon,
As be semynge, had she noon,
Hyr throte, as I have now memoyre,
Semed a rounde toure of yvoyre,
Of goode gretenessse, and noght to grete.
And goode faire White she hethe,
That was my lady name, ryghte.
She was bothe faire and bryghte,
She had not hir name wronge;
Ryght faire shuldres, and body longe
She had, and armes; every lyth
Fattyssh, flesshy, not grete thervith,
Ryght white handes, and nayles rede;
Rounde brestes, and of good brede

981 hir om.
Hyr hippoc were, a streight flat bakke.
I knewe on hir noon other lakke,
That al hir lymmes were pure sywynges
In as ferre as I had knowynge.
Therto she koude so wel pley,
Whan that hir lyst, that I dar sey
That she was lyke to torche bryght
That every man may take of lyght
Ynogh, and hyt hathe never the lesse.
Of maner and of comlynesse
Ryght so ferde my lady dere;
For every wight of hir manere
Myght cachche ynogh, yif that he wolde,
Yif he had eyen hir to beholde;
For I dar swere wel, yif that she
Had amonge ten thousande be,
She wolde have be, at the lest,
A chefe meroure of al the fest,
Thogh they had stonde in a rowe,
To mennys eyen koude have knowe.
For wher so men had played or wakyed,
Me thoghth the felysshyppe as naked
Withouten hir, that sawgh I oones,
As a corowne withoute stones.
Trewly she was to myn eye
The soleyne Fenix of Arabye,
For ther levyth nevir but oon;
Ne swich as she ne knowe I noon.
To speke of godenesse, trewly, she
Had as moche debonairyte
As ever had Hester in the Bible,
And more, yif more were possyble.
And sothe to seyne, therwythalle
She had a wytte so generalle,
THE BOOKE OF THE DUCHESSE

So hoolo enclyned to alle goode,
That al hir wytte was set, by the rode,
Withoute malyce, upon gladnesse.
And therto I sawgh never yet a lesse
Harmefull than she was in doynghe.
I sey nat that she ne had knowynge
What harme was, or elles she
Had koude no good, so thenketh me.
And trewly, for to speke of trouthe
But she had hadde, hyt hadde be routhe;
Therof she had so moche hyr dele,
And I dar seyn, and swere hyt wele,
That Trouthe hymselfe over al and alle
Had chose hys maner principalle
In hir, that was his restynghe place.
Therto she hadde the moste grace
To have stedefaste perseveraunce
And esy stempry governaunce
That ever I knewe, or wyste ytte,
So pure suffraunt was hir wytte.
And reson gladly she understooode;
Hyt folowed wel she koude goode.
She used gladly to do wel,
These were hir maners everydel;
Therwith she loved so wel ryght,
She wronge do wolde to no wyght,
No wyght myght doo hir noo shame,
She loved so wel hir oune name
Hyr lust to holde no wyght in honde,
Ne, be thou siker, she wolde not fonde
To holde no wyght in balaunce
By halfe worde, ne by countenaunce,
But yif men wolde upon hir lye;
Ne sende men into Walakye,
To Pruyse, and into Tartarye,
To Alysandre, ne into Turkuy,
And byd hym faste anoon, that he
Goo hooedles to the drye se,
And come home by the Carrenare,
And sey, 'Sir, be now ryght ware,
That I may of yow here seyn
Worshyppe, or that ye come ageyn.'
She ne used no suche knakkes smale.

But wherfore that y tel my tale?
Ryght on thys same, as I have seyde,
Was hooly al my love leyde;
For certes, she was, that swete wife,
My suffisaunce, my luste, my lyfe,
Myn happe, myn hele, and al my blysse,
My worldys welfare and my lisse,
And I hooly hires, and everydel!''
"By oure lord," quod I, "y trowe yow wel,
Hardely, your love was wel besette.
I not how ye myght have doo bette."
"Bette? ne no wyght so wele," quod he,
"Y trowe hyt wel, sir," quod I, "parde!"
"Nay, leve hyt wel!" "Sire, so do I;
I leve yow wel, that trewly
Yow thoghte, that she was the best,
And to be-holde the alderfayrest,
Who soo had loked hir with your eyen."
"With myn? nay, al that hir seyen
Seyde and swore hyt was soo;
And thogh they ne hadde, I wolde thoo
Have loved best my lady free.
Thogh I had hadde al the beaute
That ever had Alcipyades,
And al the strengthe of Ercules,
And therto had the worthynesse

1027 into. 1039 lisse goddesse.
Of Alysaunder, and all the rychesse
That ever was in Babyloyne,
In Cartage, or in Macedoyne,
Or in Rome, or in Nynyve;
And to also as hardy be
As was Ector, so have I joye,
That Achilles slough at Troye—
And therfore was he slayn alsoo,
In a temple, for bothe twoo
Were slayne, he and Antylegyus—
And so seyth Daires Frygius,
For love of Polixena;
Or ben as wis as Mynerva,
I wolde ever, withoute drede,
Have loved hir, for I most nede.
Nede? nay, trewly, I gabbe nowe;
Noght 'nede,' and I wol telle howe;
For of goode willé myn hert hyt wolde,
And eke to love hir I was holde
As for the fairest and the beste.
She was as good, so have I reste,
As ever was Penoloope of Grece,
Or as the noble wife Lucrece,
That was the best, he telleth thus,
The Romayne, Tytus Lyvyus.
She was as good, and nothynge lyke,
Thogh hir stories be autentyke;
Algate she was as trewe as she—
But wherfore that I telle the?
Whan I firste my lady say,
I was ryght yonge, sothe to say,
And ful grete nede I hadde to lerne;
Whan my herte wolde yerne
To love, hyt was a grete empryse.
But as my wytte koude beste suffise,
After my yonge childely wytte,
Without drede, I besette hytte,
To love hir in my beste wyse
To do hir worshippe, and the servise
That I koude thoo, be my trouthe,
Without feynynge outher slouthe;
For wonder feyne I wolde hir se,
So mochel hyt amended me,
That whan I sawgh hir first a-morwe
I was warished of al my sorwe,
Of al day after til hyt were eve;
Me thoughte nothyng myghte me greve
Were my sorwes never so smerte.
And yet she sytte so myn herte,
That by my trouthe y holde noght,
For ay thys worlde, oute of my thoght
Leve my lady, noo, trewly!"

"Now by my trouthe, sir," quod I,
"Me thynketh ye have suche a chaunce
As shryfte wythoute repentaunce."

"Repentaunce? nay, fy!" quod he,
"Shulde y now repente me
To love? nay, certis, than were I wel
Wers than was Achetofel,
Or Anthenor, so have I joye,
The traytorc that betrayed Troye;
Or the false Genelloun,
He that purchased the tresoun
Of Rowlande and of Olyvere.
Nay, while I am alyve here,
I nyl foryte hir never moo."

"Now, good syr," quod I, as thoo,
"Ye han wel tolde me here before,
Hyt ys no nede to reherse more,
THE BOOKE OF THE DUCHESSE

How ye sawgh hir firste, and where;
But wolde ye tel me the manere
To hire which was your first speche?
Therof I wolde yow besche;
And how she knewe first your thoght,
Whether ye loved hir or noght;
And telleth me eke what ye have lore
I herde yow telle herebefore."

"Yee," he seyde, "thow nost what thou menyst;
I have lost more than thou wenyst."
"What losse ys that?" quod I thoo.
"Nyl she not love yow? ys hyt soo?
Or have ye oght doon amys,
That she hathe lefte yow, ys hyt this?
For Goddys love, telle me alle."
"Before God," quod he, "and I shalle.
I say ryght as I have seyde,
On hir was al my love leyde,
And yet she nyste hyt never a del
Noght longe tyme, leve hyt wel.
For be ryght siker, I durste noght
For al this worlde tel hir my thoght,
Ne I wolde have wraththed hir, trewly.
For wostow why, she was lady
Of the body, she had the hert,
And who hath that may not astert.
But, for to kepe me fro ydelenesse,
Trewly I did my besynesse
To make songes, as I best koude,
And ofte tyme I songe hem loude,
And made songes this a grete dele,
Al thogh I koude not make so wele
Songes, ne knowe the arte alle
As koude Lamekys sone, Tuballe,
That founde out firste the art of songe;
For as hys brothres hamers ronge
Upon hys anvelet, up and doun,
Therof he tooke the first soun.

1165
But Grekes seyn Pictagoras,
That he the firste fynder was
Of the arte; Aurora telleth soo,
But therof no fors of hem twoo.

Algatis, songes thus I made
Of my felynge, myn hert to glade,
And loo, this was myn alther-first—
I not wher hyt were the werst—

1170

'Lorde, hyt maketh myn herte lyght
When I thenke on that swete wyght
That is so semely on to see;
And wisse to God, hit myght so bee
That she wolde holde me for hir knyght,
My lady, that is so faire and bryght!'

1175

Now have I tolde, the sothe to say,
My firste songe. Upon a day
I bethoghte me what woo
And sorwe that I suffred thoo
For hir, and yet she wyst hyt noght,
Ne tel hir durst I nat my thoght.

1185

'Allas,' thoght I, 'y kan no rede!
And, but I telle hir, I nam but dede.
And yif I telle hyr, to sey ryght sothe,
I am adred she wol be wrothe.
Allas, what shal I thanne doo?'

1190

In this debate I was so woo
Me thoght myn herte brast a-twewayne.
So at the laste, sothe to sayne,
I be-thoght me, that nature
Ne formed never in creature
So moche beaute, trewely
And bounte, wythoute mercy.
In hope of that, my tale I tolde
With sorwe, as that I never sholde;
For nedys, and mawgree my hede,
I most have tolde hir, or be dede.
I not wel how that I beganne—
Ful evel reherse hyt I kan—
And eke, as helpe me God withalle,
I trowe hyt was in the dismalle
That was the ten woundes of Egipte;
For many a worde I overskipte
In my tale, for pure fere
Lest my wordys mys-sette were.
With sorwefull herte, and woundes dede,
Softe and quakyngge for pure drede
And shame, and styntyngge in my tale
For ferde, and myn bewe al pale,
Ful ofte I wexe bothe pal and rede.
Bowynge to hir I heng the hede—
I durste nat ones loke hir on—
For witte, maner, and al was goon.
I seyde 'mercy!' and no more.
Hyt nas no game, hyt sate me sore.
So at the laste, sothe to seyne,
Whan that myn hert was come ageyne,
To telle shortly al my speche,
With hool herte I gan hir beseche
That she wolde be my lady swete;
And swore, and gan hir hertely hete
Ever to be stedfast and trewe,
And love hir alwey fresshly newe,
And never other lady have,
And al hir worshippe for to save.
As I best koude, I swore hir this,
'For youres is alle, that ever ther ys,
For evermore, myn herte swete,
And never to false yow, but I mete,
I nyl, as wysse God helpe me soo!'
And whan I had my tale ydoo,
God wote, she acounted nat a stree
Of al my tale, so thoghte me!
To telle shortly ryght as hyt ys,
Trewly hir answere, hyt was this—
I kan not now wel counterfete
Hyr wordys, but this was the grete
Of hir answere, she sayde 'nay!'
Alle outerly, alas, that day!
The sorowe I suffred, and the woo
That trewly Cassandra, that soo
Bewayled the destruccioun
Of Troy and of Ilyoun
Had never swich sorwe as I thoo.
I durst no more say ther-too
For pure fere, but stale away;
And thus I lyved ful many a day,
That trewely I hadde no nede
Ferther than my beddes hede
Never a day to seche sorwe.
I fonde hyt redy every morwe,
For why, I loved hyr in no gere.
So hit befel another yere,
I thoughte ones I wolde fonde
To do hir knowe and understonde
My woo, and she wel understode
That I ne wilned no thynge but gode

1230
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And worshippe, and to kepe hir name
Over alle thynges, and dred hir shame,
And was so besy hyr to serve,
And pitee were I shulde sterve,
Syth that I wilned noon harme, ywys.
So whan my lady knewe al thys
My lady yaf me al hooly
The noble yifte of hir mercy,
Savyng hir worshippe by al weyes,
Dredles, I mene noon other weyes.
And therwith she yaf me a rynge,
I trowe hyt was the first thyng.
But yif myn hert was iwaxe
Gladde, that is no nede to axe.
As helpe me God, I was as blyve
Reysed as fro dethe to lyve,
Of al happes the alderbeste,
The gladdest, and the moste at reste;
For trewely that swete wyght,
Whan I had wrong and she the ryght,
She wolde alway so goodely
Foryeve me so debonairely,
In al my yowthe, in alle chaunce,
She tooke me in hir governaunce.
Therwyth she was alway so trewe
Our joye was ever-lyche newe.
Oure hertys werne so evene a payre
That never nas that oon contrarye
To that other, for noo woo.
For sothe lyphce they suffred thoo
Oo blysse and eke oo sorwe bothe;
Ylyphce they were, bothe glad and wrothe;
Al was us oon, withoute were;
And thus we lyved ful many a yere

1280 trewly. 1281 the om. 1284 al (2).
So wel, I kan nat telle how!"  "Sir," quod I, "where is she now?"
"Now!" quod he, and stynte anoon. . . .
Therwith he waxe as dede as stoon,
And seyde, "Alas, that I was bore!
That was the losse that here before
I tolde the, that I hadde lorne.
Bethenke how I seyde herebeforene
"Thow wost ful lytel what thow menyst,
I have lost more than thow wenyst,
God wote, alas, ryght that was she!"
"Alas, sir, how? what may that be?"
"She ys ded!" "nay!" "Yis, be my trouthe!"
"Is that youre losse? be God, hyt ys routhe!"
And with that worde, ryght anoon
They gan to strake forth, al was doon,
For that tyme the herte huntynge.
With that me thoghte that this kyng
Anoon gan homewarde for to ryde
Unto a place was there besyde,
Which was from us but a lyte,
A longe castel, with wallys white,
Be seynt Johan, on a ryche hille,
As me mette; but thus hyt fille—
Ryght thus me mette, as I yow telle—
That in the castell ther was a belle,
As hyt hadde smyten oures twelve.
Therowyth I awoke my selle,
And fonde me lyinge in my bedde,
And the booke that I hadde redde
Of Alcione and Seys the kyng
And of the goddys of slepynge,
I fond hyt in myn honde ful evegne.
Thoght I, "Thys ys so queynt a swevne
That I wol, be processe of tyme,
Fonde to put this swevene in ryme
As I kan best, and that anoon."
This was my swevene, now hit ys doon.

Explicit the Boke of the Duchesse.