Now I have also this disposition, that of all the flowers in the meadow I most love those white and red flowers, which men in our town call daisies. I have such affection for them, as I have said, that when May has arrived, no day dawns upon me in my bed, but I am up and walking in the meadow to see these flowers opening to the sun when it rises, in the bright morning, and through the long day thus I walk in the green. 50

That blissful sight softens all my sorrow, so glad I am for it, when I am in the presence of it, to give reverence to her. And I love it, and continually do, and ever shall, until my heart should die. I swear all this; I will not lie about this; no creature ever loved so passionately in his life. All day long I wait for nothing else, and I shall not lie, but to look upon the daisy, that well by reason people may call it the “day’s-eye,” or else the “eye of day,” the empress and flower of all flowers. (52-60F)

And when the sun draws toward the west, then they close and take them to slumber until the morning when the day comes, so sorely they fear the night. This daisy, flower of all flowers, filled with all excellence and honor, always and alike fair and lusty of hue, fresh in winter as well as in summer, gladly would I praise it if I properly could. But I am filled with woe, for it lies not in my power! 60

For well I know that people have reaped the field of poetry before me and have harvested the corn. I come after, gleaning here and there, and am very glad if perhaps I find an ear of any goodly words that they have left behind. And if I chance to recount again what they have said in their lusty songs, I hope that they will not be displeased, since all is said in furthering and worship of them who are followers of either the leaf or flower; but offer help, you who have knowledge and power, you lovers who can write about emotions. (68-69F)

For trust well, I have not undertaken to sing in honor of the leaf against the flower, or of the flower against the leaf of antiquity, as is usual in the world. Now I have so little skill in poetry that I cannot be held to blame. 70

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1 Legend. As used by Chaucer in this case, a legend refers to a biography of a saint, and a legendary is a collection of a number of such stories.
2 Bernard the monk. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), Founder of the Cistercian order of monks, a major mystic and scholar in the medieval church.
3 F. There are two major versions of the Prologue to the LGW, known as F and G. This translation follows the G version, but adds significant passages from the F version that are not included in G. In order to follow the logic of the narration, some minor rearrangement of material was necessary.
4 Flower and Leaf. The imagery of the flower and the leaf seems to have permeated court life in Chaucer’s time, the flower signifying the glamour of the members of the court themselves and the leaf those who worked for or supported them. Cf. the contemporary poem by the name, The Flower and the Leaf.
Now the mild sun had relieved all that, and clothed him in green all afresh. Rejoicing in the season, the little birds that had escaped the snare and the net mocked the fowler who had frightened them in winter and destroyed their brood, and eased their hearts to sing of him in scorn, and to flout the foul churl who for his greed had betrayed them with his tricks. This was their song, “The fowler we defy, and all his craft!”

On the branches some sang sweet songs of love and spring, in honor and praise of their mates, and for the new, joyous summer; it was a joy to listen. Upon those branches full of soft blossoms, in their delight they turned themselves often and sang, (143-44F)

Blessed be Saint Valentine! For on his day I chose you to be mine, My sweetheart, and never have I repented.”

And then they joined their beaks, and they paid honor and tenderness to each other, and then did other ceremonies pleasing to love and nature. (I listened carefully to their song, for I dreamed I understood their meaning.) 140

And those that had been unfaithful—as the tydif bird is, for the sake of novelty—sought mercy for their trespassing, and humbly sang their repentance, and swore on the blossoms to be true, so that their mates would have mercy upon them, and at the last made their accord. (153-59F)

They all found a lord named Danger for a time, yet Pity, through his strong gentle might, forgave, and allowed Mercy to surpass Justice, through innocence and self-controlled Courtesy. But I do not call innocence folly, nor false pity, for virtue lies in the mean, as Etik says. This is the manner to which I am referring. (160-66F)

And thus these birds, void of all malice, agreed to love, and gave up the vice of hate, and sang all of one accord, “Welcome, summer, our governor and lord!” And Zephyrus and Flora gently gave to the flowers, soft and tenderly, their sweet breath, and made them spread, as god and goddess of the flowery meadow. In this place it seemed to me I might, day by day, dwell

5 Chaff. Chaucer, following the Church Fathers, distinguishes between the Corn (or wheat) of the story, which is the essential truth, and the Chaff, which is the story’s ornamentation,

6 Danger here refers to the quality in a woman to resist a lover, if only temporarily, for the sake of her honor.

7 Etik. The reference to the source of this commonplace idea that happiness comes through moderation is not clear. It might be a reference to Horace, but is more likely to the Ethics of Aristotle.
always, the jolly month of May, without sleep, without food or drink. (167-177F)

Then at last a lark sang on high. She said, “I see the mighty god of Love! Lo, yonder he comes! I see his wings spread!” Then I looked along the meadow and saw him come, leading by the hand a lady clothed in a royal habit of green. She had a net of gold around her hair, and over that a white crown with many flowers; for all the world just as the flower of the daisy is crowned with little white leaves, such were the flowers of her white crown, for it was made all of one fine oriental pearl; for this reason the white crown above the green, with the golden ornament in her hair, made her appear like a daisy. 157

This mighty god of Love was clothed in silk embroidered full of green sprigs; on his head was a garland of rose-leaves, all set with fresh lilies. But the hue of his face I cannot tell, for truly his face shone so bright that the eye was dazzled by the gleam. For several minutes I could not look at him, but at last I saw that he held in his hands two fiery arrows, red as glowing coals. And he spread his wings like an angel. Albeit men say he is blind, but it seemed to me that he could see well enough; for he looked sternly upon me, so that his look even now makes my heart cold. 172

He held by the hand this noble lady, crowned with white and clothed all in green, who was so womanly, benign and gentle that though men should seek throughout this world they should not find half her beauty in any being formed by nature. Her name was Alceste the gentle. May fair fortune ever come to her, I pray to God! For had it not been for the comfort of her presence, I would have been dead without help, for fear of Love’s words and look, as you shall learn hereafter, when the time comes. 184

On the grass, behind this god of Love, I saw a company of nineteen ladies in royal garb coming at a gentle pace. And after them came such a train of women that I believed that all the possible women who had ever lived in this world since God made Adam from earth composed only one third of them or one fourth. And every one of these women was faithful in love. Now was this a wondrous thing or not? For as soon as they perceived this flower that I call the daisy, they quickly stopped altogether and kneeled down by that very flower and sang with one voice, (282-96F)

“Hail and honor
To faithful womanhood, and this flower
That bears the symbol of our faithfulness!
Her white crown bears for us all the witness.” (296-99F)

And after that they went in a circle slowly dancing around it, and sang, as it were in the fashion of a carol, this ballade which I shall tell you. 202

Ballad

Thy beautiful body, oh, let it not appear,
Lavinia; and Lucrece too of Rome-town,
And Polyxena, who paid for love so dear,
And Cleopatra, with all your passion,
Hide your truth in loving and your renown,
And Thisbe, who for love had borne such pain;
Alceste comes, who makes all this pale and vain.

255

This ballad may have been well sung, as I have said earlier, about my noble lady; for certainly these cannot suffice to be equal with my lady in no way. For as the sun will make the fire appear pale, so too my lady, who is so good, so fair, so gracious, surpasses all. I pray to God that goodness may come to her! (270-81)

When this ballad was all sung, they sat full gently down upon the sweet and soft green grass, in order all in a circle about. First sat the god of Love, and then this lady clad in green wit the white crown; and then near them all the rest sat courteously, according to their station. And then, for several minutes, in the entire place not a word was spoken. 233

Close by, reclining beneath a grassy slope, I waited, still as any stone, to learn what this group intended; until at last the god of Love turned his eyes on me and said, “Who is it who rests there?” 238

And I answered his question and said, “Sir, it is I.” And I came nearer, and greeted him. 240
He said, “What are you doing here in my presence, and so boldly? For truly a worm would be more worthy to come into my sight than you.” 244

“And why, sir,” I said, “if it please you?” 245

“Because,” he said, “you are in no way fit. My servants are all wise and honorable; you are my mortal foe, and war against me, and speak evil of my old servants. And with your works of translation you plague them and hinder people’s devotion in my service, and hold it to be folly to trust in me. You cannot deny it; for in text so plain that it needs no commentary you have translated the Romance of the Rose, which is heresy against my religion; and you cause wise folk to withdraw from me, and think in your cool wit that anyone is but a proper fool who loves with passion, too hard and hot. Well I know by this that you begin to drivel, as these old fools when their spirit fails; for then they abuse others, and know not what is amiss with themselves. 263

“Have you not also made in English the poem which tells how Criseyde forsook Troilus, to show how women have gone astray? But nevertheless answer me this now, why would you not also speak well of women, as you have spoken evilly? Was there no good matter in your memory, and in all your books could you not find some story of good and faithful women? 272

“Yes, God knows! You have sixty books, old and new, all full of long stories, in which both Romans and Greeks treat of various women, what kind of life they led, and there is always a hundred good to one bad. This God knows, and all clerks as well who use them to seek out such matters. What says Valerius or Livy or Claudian? What says Jerome, in his treatise against Jovinian? Jerome tells of pure maidens and faithful wives, of widows steadfast unto death; and he tells not of a few, but I dare say a hundred in succession, until it is piteous and sorrowful to read of the woe they endured for their faithfulness. 287

“For they were so true to their love that, rather than take a new mate, they chose death in various manners, and died just as the story will relate. Some were burned, some had their throats cut, and some were drowned, because they would not be false. For they all kept their maidenhood, or else widowhood or wedlock. And this was not done for devoutness, but for true virtue and purity, and so that men should put no blame on them. And yet they were heathen, all of them, who so sorely dreaded all disgrace. These women of old so guarded their good name that I believe men shall not find in this world a man who could be so true and kind as was the least woman in those days. Likewise, what do the epistles of Ovid say about true wives and their travails? 306

“What says Vincent, in his Historical Mirror? You may also hear the whole world of authors, Christian and heathen, discuss such matters. There is no need to write all day about them; but again I say, what ails you to write the chaff of stories and overlook the corn? By Saint Venus, by whom I was born, though you have rejected my faith, as other old fools have done in many days gone by, you shall repent your action in the sight of all men. 316

Then spoke Alceste, the worthy queen: “God, by your true courtesy, you must listen and see whether he can make any reply to these charges that you have made against him. A god should not thus be moved to anger, but being a deity he should be stable, and righteous and merciful as well. He cannot rightfully vent his ire before he has heard the other party speak. All that is carried to you in complaint is not the gospel truth; the god of Love hears many false tales. For in your court there are many flatterers, and many artful, tattling accusers, who drum many things in your ears out of hatred or jealous imaginings, or to have friendly talk with you. Envy—I pray God may give her bad luck!—forever washes the foul linen in a great court; out of the house of Caesar she departs neither by night nor day (thus says Dante). No matter who departs, never will she be lacking. This man may be accused wrongly, and by rights should be absolved. 339

“Oh else, sir, because this man is unwise, he might translate a thing not out of malice but because he is so used to writing books that he heeds not the substance of them; therefore, he wrote the Rose and Criseyde entirely innocently and knew not what he was saying.”

8 Troilus. Chaucer’s Troilus and Criseyde.
9 Valerius or Livy or Claudian. Valerius. Identity is uncertain, but likely the author of Epistola Valerii ad Rufinum. Livy. Titus Livius (59 B.C.-17 A.D.), the Roman historian, author of an extensive History of Rome. Claudian. 4th-Century Roman poet, reputed as the last poet of classical Rome, author of De Raptu Prosperina. (All three recorded stories of rapes or abuses of women.)
10 Jovinian. A treatise known as Jerome against Jovinian, which is St. Jerome infamous attack on marriage. The work, however, does often praise women in general.

11 Ovid. Ovid’s Heroides is a collection of letters written from famous women to the men who have left them.
12 Vincent of Beauvais’ Speculum Historiale. Comprehensive history which includes the story of Cleopatra, the first of the nine tales to follow.
Or else he was told by some person to write those poems, and dared not refuse it, for before this he has written many books. In translating what old clerks have written, he has not sinned so grievously as if he should in malice write scornfully of love from his own point of view. 352

“A righteous lord should have this in mind, and not be like Lombard tyrants who practice willful tyranny¹³, for a king or lord by natural right ought not to be tyrannical or cruel like a tax collector, doing all the harm he can. He must bear in mind that they are his subjects, and that his true duty is to show all kindness toward his people, to hear their defenses readily, and their complaints and petitions in due time when they present them. This is the philosopher’s¹⁴ saying, that a king shall maintain his subjects through justice; that is his duty, in truth, and to this end a king is sworn deeply and has been for hundreds years; and he shall maintain his lords in their station, as it is right and reasonable that they be exalted and honored and held most dear, for they are demi-gods here in this world. 373

“Thus shall he do to both rich and poor, albeit their conditions may not be alike, and have compassion on the poor. For behold the noble nature of the lion! When a fly annoys or bites him, he gently drives the fly away with his tail; for in his noble nature he does not stoop to avenge himself upon a fly, as a dog and other beasts may do. A noble nature should show restraint and weigh all things by equity, and ever regard his own high station. For, sir, it is no noble act for a lord to condemn a man without speech or answer; in a lord that is a very foul practice. And if it should happen that the man cannot excuse himself, yet with sorrowful heart asks mercy, and humbly in his bare shirt yields himself up wholly to your judgment, then a god with his honor, I neither may nor will refuse your petition. All thanks will be greater for it. Judge, therefore, what he does a kindness, let him do it in good time, and his lordship first." 397

“This man has served you with his art and has furthered your religion with his poetry. While he was young he followed you; I know not whether he is now a renegade. But well I know that by what he has been able to write in praise of your name he has caused unlearned people to rejoice in serving you. He wrote the book called the House of Fame, and the Death of Blanche the Duchess¹⁵ as well, and the Parliament of Birds, I believe, and all the love of Palamon and Arcite of Thebes¹⁶, though the tale is little known; and for your holy days many hymns, which are called Ballades, Roundels, and Virelays¹⁷; and to speak of other laborious works, he has translated Boethius¹⁸ in prose, and Of the Wretched Engendering of Mankind¹⁹, which may be found in Pope Innocent; and he also wrote the life of Saint Cecilia²⁰, and also, a long while ago, Origen upon the Magdalene²¹. He ought now to have the lesser penalty; he has written many lays and many works. 420

“Now as you are a god and a king, I, your Alceste, once queen of Thrace, ask you of your mercy never to harm this man so long as he lives. And he shall swear to you, and do so without delay, that he will sin no more thus. But just as you shall direct, so shall he write of women ever faithful in love, maidens or wives, whatsoever you wish. And he shall further you as much as he spoke amiss in the Rose or in Crisye.” 431

Forthwith the god of Love answered her thus: “Madame,” he said, “it is long that I have known you to be so charitable and faithful that never, since the world was new, have I found any person who acted better toward me. Therefore, if I wish to safeguard my honor, I neither may nor will refuse your petition. All lies with you; do with him as pleases you, and forgive all, without further delay. For whosoever gives a gift or does a kindness, let him do it in good time, and his thanks will be greater for it. Judge, therefore, what he shall do. Go now, thank my lady here,” he said. 444

¹³ Lombard tyrants. A stereotype of the powerful men of 14th Century Lombardy (Italy), though the stereotype may well be warranted.
¹⁴ The Philosopher. Aristotle.
¹⁵ Death of Blanche the Duchess. Chaucer’s Book of the Duchess.
¹⁶ Palamon and Arcite of Thebes. Chaucer’s Palammon and Arcite.
¹⁷ Hymns, Ballades, Roundels, and Virelays. Four types of formal poetry, the last two borrowed from the French tradition. Few of Chaucer’s surviving poems, however, fit these descriptions.
¹⁸ Boethius. Ancius Manlius Severinus (c. 475-525), Roman philosopher, consul and minister to Theodoric, accused of treason. While awaiting execution he wrote De Consolatione Philosophiae (The Consolation of Philosophy), one of the most important books for the Middle Ages, which Chaucer translated into English (Boece).
¹⁹ The Wretched Engendering of Mankind. This work is apparently lost, though it was presumably a translation of Pope Innocent III’s De miseria condicionis humanae.
²¹ Origen upon the Magdalene. Usually regarded as a lost translation of the pseudo-Origen homily De Maria Magdalena, though The Lamentation of Mary Magdalene, included in the early printed editions of Chaucer, seems to be at least an approximation of this early work.
I rose, and then got down on my knee and said:
“Madame, may God on high reward you because you have made the god of Love forgive his wrath against me; and may He grant me the grace to live so long until I may truly know who you are who have helped me and put me in such a hopeful state. But truly in this matter I thought not to have sinned or to have trespassed against love. For an honest man, in truth, has no part in the deeds of a thief; and a true lover ought not to blame me, though I speak in reproach of a false lover. He ought rather to remain on his side, because I wrote of Criseyde or of the Rose; whatsoever my author meant, it was my intention at least, God knows, to exalt faithfulness in love and to cherish it; and to warn people of falseness and evil by such examples. This was mine intent.” 464

And she answered, “Set aside your arguing, for Love will hear no pleas against himself, just or unjust; learn this from me. You have your pardon; hold yourself to that. Now will I say what penance you shall do for your trespass; understand it now. As long as you live, year by year you shall spend the most part of your life in writing a glorious legend of good women, maidens, and wives, who were ever faithful in love, and you shall tell of the false men who betrayed them, men who all their life do nothing but see how many women they can shame—for in your world that is now seen as a sport. And though you care not be a lover, speak well of love. This penance I give you. And I will so pray the god of Love that he shall charge his servants in any way to aid you and shall requite your labor. And when this book has been completed, give it to the queen, on my behalf, at Eltham or at Sheene.(496-97F) Now go your way; your penance is only a small one.” 485

The god of Love smiled, and then he said, “Do you know whether she is a maiden or wife, a queen or a countess, or of what degree, this woman who has given so little penance to you who have deserved to suffer more sorely? But pity runs soon into a noble heart; that you can see. She manifests what she is.” 492

And I answered, “No, sir, as I hope for happiness, I know no more than that I see well she is kind.” 494

“By my hood,” Love said, “that is a true saying; and that you well know, by God, if you well consider. In a book that lies in your chest, do you not have the story of the great goodness of Queen Alcestis, who was turned into a daisy? She who chose to die for her husband and to go to hell also instead of him? She whom Hercules rescued, by God, and brought out of hell back to happiness?” 504

And I replied, “Yes, now I know her! And is this the good Alcestis, the daisy, mine own heart’s repose25? Now I feel well this woman’s goodness, that both in her life and after her death her great goodness makes her renown double. Well has she required me for my affection which I bear toward her flower, the daisy. It is no wonder that Jove should turn her into a star, as Agathon23 tells, for her goodness. Her white crown bears witness of it; for she had as many excellences as there are small flowers in her crown. In remembrance and honor of her Cybele24 created the daisy, the flower all crowned with white, as men can see; and Mars gave its redness25 to her crown, set amidst the white instead of rubies.” 522

At this the queen grew somewhat red from modesty, when she was so praised in her presence. Then said Love, “It was a great negligence to write about the lack of steadfastness of women, since you know their goodness by experience and by old stories as well. Set aside the chaff, and write well of the corn. Why would you not write of Alcestis, and leave Criseyde sleeping in peace? For your writing should be of Alcestis, since you know that she is a model of goodness; for she taught noble love, and especially how a wife ought to live, and all the bounds that she should keep. Your little wit was sleeping that time. But now I charge you on your life that in your Legend you write of this woman, after you have written of other lesser ones. And now farewell, I charge you no more. 540

“But before I go, this much I will tell you: no true lover shall go to hell. These other ladies sitting here in a row are in your ballad, if you can recognize them, and in your books you shall find them all. Set them now all in mind in your legend; I mean, of those that are in your knowledge. For sitting here are twenty thousand more than you know, all good women, and true in love for anything that may happen. The sun is thousand more than you know, all good women, and true in love for anything that may happen. The sun is drawing west. I must go home to paradise with this entire company. Make the verses of them as you wish, and serve always the fresh daisy. (552-565F)

“I wish you to begin with Cleopatra; and so continue. And so you shall gain my love. For let us see now what

22 Alcestis. Chaucer has apparently forgotten that Alcestis was introduced eighty lines earlier.
23 Agathon. This may refer to the Greek dramatist Agatone named in Dante’s Purgatorio 22.107; it may also refer to Plato’s Symposium, known as Agatho’s Feast, which contains the story of Alcestis.
24 Cybele. In Phrygian relian the Great Mother of the gods, a goddess of fertility.
25 Redness. Some have suggested that this refers to the red tips of the petals, but it likely refers to the gold in the center. (Red is still often used as the term to refer to gold today.)
sort of man that lover would be, who would endure so strong a pain for love as she. I know well that thou may not set all that such lovers did in their time to rhyme; it would be too long to read and to hear. It will suffice me that you make it in this manner: that thou retell the important part of all their lives, following what these ancient authors wish to treat. For whosoever shall tell so many stories, may he tell them shortly, or he shall dwell too long.” (568-577F)

And at these words I awoke from my sleep, and I began to write on my Legend even thus. 545

Explicit prohemium26.

I. The Legend of Cleopatra

Incipit Legenda Cleopatrie, Martiris, Egipti regine27.

After the death of the king Ptolemy, who had all Egypt under his rule, Cleopatra his queen reigned; until a certain time28 when a certain situation arose that out of Rome there was sent a senator to win kingdoms and honors for the town of Rome, as was their custom, and to have the world under their obedience; and in truth his name was Antony. As Fortune owed him a disgrace after he had met with prosperity29, it so happened that he became a rebel to the town of Rome; and moreover he falsely deserted the sister of Caesar, before she was aware, and at any cost wished to have another wife. For these reasons he fell at odds with Caesar and with Rome. 595

Nevertheless this same senator was a worthy, noble warrior, in truth, and his death was a great pity. But Love had brought this man into such a madness and so tightly bound him in his snare, all for love of Cleopatra, that he set all the world at no value. Nothing seemed to him so necessary as to love and serve Cleopatra. He cared not to die in arms in defense of her and of her right. And this noble queen in like fashion loved this knight, for his merit and his knighthood; and certainly, unless the books lie, he was in his person, nobility, discretion, and hardiness as worthy as any person alive. And she was as fair as the rose in May. And, as it is best to write briefly, she became his wife and had him as she desired. 615

To describe the wedding and the festival would take too long for me, who have undertaken such an enterprise as to put in verses so many stories, lest I should neglect things of greater weight and importance. For men may overload a ship or a barge. Therefore I will skip lightly to the conclusion, and let the remains slip. 623

Octavian, maddened by this deed, raised a host of stout Romans, cruel as lions, to lead against Antony for his utter destruction. They went to their ship, and I leave them sailing thus. Antony was wary and would not avoid encountering these Romans if he could; he laid his plans, and on a day both he and his wife and his entire host went forth without delay to their ship; they delayed no longer. Out at sea it happened that the foes met; the trumpet sounds on high, they shout and shoot and with the sun at their back make a fierce onset. 636

With a grisly sound out flies the huge shot, and furiously they hurtle together, and from the fore-tops down come the great stones. Among the ropes go shearing-hooks and grapnels full of claws. This man and that presses on with poleaxes; one flies behind the mast, and out again, and drives the other over board. One pierces another upon his spear-point; one cuts the sail with hooks like scythes; another brings the wine-cup and bids them be glad; one pours peas upon the hatches to make them slippery; they rush together with pots full of quicklime. 649

And thus they pass the long day in battle, until at last (as every: thing has an end) Antony is defeated and put to flight, and all his people scatter as best they can. 653

The queen with all her purple sails fled likewise from the blows that went thick as hail-stones; no wonder she could not endure it. And when Antony saw that chance he said, “Alas the day that I was born! So on this day I have lost all my honor!”; and in despair he started out of his wits, and stabbed himself to the heart at once, before he went further from the place. 662

His wife, who could get no mercy from Caesar, fled to Egypt in dread and anguish. But listen, all you who speak of devotion, you men who falsely swear by many oaths that you will die if your beloved should be so much as angered, behold what womanly faithfulness you may here see. 668

This woeful Cleopatra made such lament that no tongue can describe it; but in the morning she would delay no longer and commanded her skilful workmen to make a shrine out of all the rubies and fine gems that

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26 Explicit prohemium. Here ends the prologue.
27 Incipit Legenda Cleopatrie, Martiris, Egipti regine. Here begins the Legend of Cleopatra, Martyr, queen of Egypt.
28 A certain time: following the Battle of Philippi (42 B.C.).
29 Fortune: as the wheel of Fortune continually turns, good and bad fortune always follow one another.
she could uncover in all Egypt, and she filled the shrine
with spices, had the body embalmed, and called for this
dead corpse and enclosed it in the shrine. And next to
the shrine she had a pit dug, and put in it all the
serpents she could find, and thus she spoke: “Now,
beloved, whom my sorrowful heart so far obeyed that,
from that blissful hour when I swore to be entirely
and
were never out of my heart’s remembrance as long as I
was awake, day or night, in happiness or woe, in the
carol or the dance.” 30 And then I made this covenant
with myself, that, whatever it was you felt, happiness
or woe, the same would I feel, life or death, if it lay in
my power for the honor of my wifehood. And I will
fulfill that covenant while breath remains in me; and
men shall see well that never was a queen truer to her
love.” 695

And at that word with a resolute heart she leapt naked
into the pit among the serpents, and there she chose to
be buried. Immediately the serpents began to sting her,
and she received her death cheerfully, for the love of
Antony who was so dear to her. And this is truth of
history; it is no fable. 702

Now, until I find a man this faithful and steadfast, who
will so willingly die for love, I pray to God, may our
heads never ache! Amen. 705

Explicit Legenda Cleopatrie Martins31.

II. The Legend of Thisbe of Babylon

Incipit Legenda Tesbe Babilonie, martiris32.

At Babylon, the town around which Queen Semiramis
had a ditch and a very high wall built with hard well-
baked tiles, this is what happened. In this noble town
there dwelt two lords of high reputation; and they dwelt
upon a green so close to each other that there was only
a stone wall between them, as there often is in great
towns. One of these men had a son, one of the most
attractive in all that land; and the other had a daughter,
the fairest who dwelt then in the eastern world. The
name of each was brought to the other by women who
were their neighbors. For in that country, even now in

truth, maidens are closely and jealously guarded, lest
they act foolishly. 723

This young man was called Pyramus, and the maid
called Thisbe; Ovid says thus. And so their praise was
brought to each other by report, so that as they grew in
years their love grew. And certainly, as for their age,
there might have been marriage between them, except
that their fathers would not agree to it. And both alike
burned so sorely in love that none of all their friends
could hinder them from meeting secretly, sometimes
by deceit, and speaking a bit about their longings.
Cover the coals and the fire is hotter; forbid love, and it
is ten times as raging. 736

This wall that stood between them was split in two,
from the top right down, since long ago when it was
built; yet this crack was so narrow and small that it was
not visible to the tiniest extent. But what is it love
cannot find? You two lovers, to tell the truth, you first
found this narrow little crack! And they let their words,
with voices as soft as any shrift,33 pass through the
rack, and as they stood there, told all their love-
complaints and all their woe every time when they
dared. He stood upon the one side of the wall, Thisbe
upon the other, to hear the sweet sound of each other’s
voice; and thus they would deceive their guardians.
Every day they would threaten this wall and wish to
God it were beaten down. Thus they would say: “Alas,
you wicked wall! Through your envy you hinder us
entirely. Why will you not split apart, or fall in two? Or
at least, if you will not do so, yet would you at least let
us meet once, or once permit us to kiss sweetly? Then
would we be recovered from our painful cares. But
nevertheless we are indebted to you, inasmuch as you
allow us to send our words through your mortar and
stone. We still ought to be well pleased with you.” 766

When these vain words were uttered, they would kiss
the cold stone wall and take their leave and depart. And
they were glad to do this in the evening or very early,
lest people saw them. And for a long time they did
thus, until one day, when Phoebus was clear and
Aurora34 with her hot beams had dried up the dew on
the wet herbs, Pyramus came to this crack, as he was
accustomed, and then came Thisbe, and by their faith
they pledged their honor to steal away that same night,
and to beguile all their guardians and flee from the city;
and, because the fields were so broad and large, that
they might meet at one place at one time, they
appointed their meeting to be under a tree where King
Ninus was buried. (For old pagans who worshipped

30 Carol or dance. In the singing or in the dancing part of the
festivity.
31 Explicit Legenda Cleopatrie Martins. Here ends the
Legend of Cleopatra, Martyr.
32 Incipit Legenda Tesbe Babilonie, martiris. Here begins the
Legend of Thisbe of Babylon, Martyr.
33 Soft as any shrift: as soft as any words spoken in the
confessional chamber in the sacrament of penance.
34 Phoebus and Aurora. The sun and the dawn.
idols used then to be buried in fields.) And near this grave was a spring. And, to tell this tale shortly, this covenant was very strongly confirmed. To them it seemed that the sun delayed for a long time before it went down under the sea. 792

This Thise had so great a feeling and desire to see Pyramus that when she saw her time she stole away secretly at night with her face deceptively wimpled. To keep her pledge she forsook all her friends, Alas! It is pity that a woman should ever be so faithful to trust man, unless she knew him better! She went to the tree at a swift pace, for her love made her so hardy; and down beside the spring she settled herself. Alas! Without more ado a wild lioness, with mouth bloody from strangling some beast, came out of the wood to drink at the spring where Thise was sitting. And when Thise saw that, she started up, with heart all terrified, and with fearful foot fled into a cave, which she saw well by the moon. And as she ran she let fall her wimple and did not notice it, so sorely was she dismayed, and so glad of her escape as well. And thus she sat in hiding very quietly. When the lioness had drunk her fill, she roamed about the spring, and soon found the wimple, and tore it all to pieces with her bloody mouth. When this was done, she delayed no longer but made her way to the woods. 822

At last this Pyramus came, but, alas, he had stayed too long at home. The moon shone, and he could see well, and in his way, as he came speedily, he cast his eyes down to the ground, and as he looked down he saw the wide tracks of a lion in the sand, and he suddenly shuddered in his heart and grew pale and his hair stood on end; and he came nearer, and found the torn wimple. “Alas! he said. “Alas, the day that I was born! This one night will slay both us lovers! How should I ask mercy of Thisbe, when I am he who have slain her, alas! My prayer to you to come has slain you! Alas, to tell a woman to go by night to a place where peril might occur! And I so slow! Alas! If only I had been here in this place a furlong before you! Now may whatever lion there is in this forest tear apart my body; or whatever wild beast there is, now may it gnaw my heart!” 844

And with these words he sprang to the wimple, and kissed it often, and wept over it sorely and said, “Alas, wimple! There is nothing else, except that you shall feel my blood as well as you have felt the bleeding of Thise. And with these words he struck himself to the heart. The blood gushed out of the wound as broad as water when the pipe is broken. 852

Now Thise, who knew nothing of this, thought as she sat in fear, “If it so happens that my Pyramus has come here and cannot find me, he may hold me false and cruel as well.” And she came out and searched for him both with her heart and with her eyes, and thought, “I will tell him about my dread both for the lioness and for all my behavior.” 861

And at last she came upon her lover, all bloody, beating on the ground with his heels; and at this she started back, and her heart began to toss like the waves, and she grew pale as a boxwood tree. For a short moment she observed him and then well recognized that he was Pyramus, her dear heart. 868

Who could write what a deadly expression Thise had now, and how she tore her hair, and how she tormented herself, and how she lay on the ground and swooned, and how she wept his wound full of tears; how she mingled his blood with her lamentation, and did paint herself with his blood; how she embraced the dead body, alas! How did this woeful Thise act then; how she kissed his frosty mouth so cold! “Who has done this! Who has been so ruthless, to slay my beloved! O, speak, my Pyramus! I am your Thise who calls you! “And at this she lifted up his head. This woeful man, in whom still remained some life, when he heard the name of Thise cried, cast his heavy, death-like eyes upon her and down again, and yielded up his spirit. 886

Thise arose without noise or outcry, and saw her wimple, and his scabbard empty, and his sword as well, which had put him to death. Then she spoke thus: “My sorrowful hand,” she said, “is strong enough for such a task in my behalf, for love shall give me strength and boldness, I believe, to make my wound large enough. Dead I will follow you, and I will be the cause and partner also of your death,” she said. “And though nothing except death alone could truly separate you from me, you shall now no more part from me than from death, for I will go with you. And now, you wretched, jealous fathers of ours, we who were once your children, we pray you that without more ill-will we may lie together in one grave, since love has brought us this pitiful end. And may the righteous God grant every lover, that truly loves, more prosperity than ever Pyramus and Thise had! And let no woman of gentle blood be so overconfident as to place herself in such hazard. Yet God forbid a woman may be only as true in loving as any man! And for my part I shall without delay make this plain.” 912

And with these words she seized his sword immediately, which was warm and hot with her lover’s blood, and struck herself to the heart. 916
And thus are Pyramus and Thisbe gone. Of faithful men I find in all my books only a few more besides this Pyramus, and therefore I have spoken thus of him. For it is a rare delight to us men to find a man who can be tender and true in love. Here you may see that, whatsoever lover he may be, a woman has mind and daring to do as well as he.

Explicit legenda Tesbe.  

III. The Legend of Dido, Queen of Carthage

Incipit Legenda Didonis martiris, Cartaginis Regine.

May there be glory and honor, Virgil of Mantua, to your name! I shall follow your lantern as well as I can, while you lead, in telling how Aeneas perjured himself to Dido. I will follow the meaning of your Aeneid and of Ovid, and will put the main events into verse.

When Troy was brought to destruction by the wiles of the Greeks, and especially by Sinon, pretending that horse, through which many Trojans were to die, to be an offering to Minerva; and when Hector had appeared after his death, and fire so wild it could not be controlled raged through all the noble tower of Ilium, which was the chief fortification of the city; and when all the land was brought low, and Priam the king slain and brought to nothing; and when Aeneas was charged by Venus to flee, he took Ascanius his son by his right hand and fled. And on his back he bore with him his old father, called Anchises, and on the way he lost his wife Creusa. And he bore much sorrow in heart before he could find his companions. But at last, when he had found them, he prepared at certain time and quickly pushed out to sea, and sailed forth with all his men toward Italy, as destiny directed. But it is not my point to speak of his adventures on the sea here, for it is not related my subject matter; but, as I have said, my tale shall be of him and Dido, until I have finished.

So long he sailed the salty sea, until with difficulty he arrived in Libya with seven ships, and no larger fleet; and he was glad to rush to land, so shaken was he with the tempest. And when he had gained the haven, of all his fellowship he chose a knight called Achates to go with him to survey the land; he took with him no greater company. Forth they went, his comrade and he, without any to point the way, and left his ships riding at anchor.

So long he walked in the wilderness until at the last he met a huntress; she had a bow in hand, and arrows; her garments were cut short to the knee; but she was the fairest creature that ever nature had formed. And she greeted Aeneas and Achates, and thus spoke to them, when she met them: “Have you seen,” she said, “as you walked wide and far, any of my sisters in this forest with garments tucked up and arrows in their quivers walk near you, with any wild boar or other beast that they have hunted?”

“Nay truly, lady,” said this Aeneas; “but it seems to me by your beauty you can not be a woman of this world, I would think, but are the sister of Phoebus. And, if it is so that you are a goddess, have pity on our labor and woe.

“Truly, I am no goddess,” she said; “for here in this land maidens walk with arrows and bow in this manner. This is the realm of Libya where you are, of which Dido is lady and queen.” And briefly she told him all the reason of Dido’s coming to those parts, of which I wish not to write now; there is no need, for it would be a waste of time. For this is the sum and substance: it was Venus, his own mother, who thus spoke with Aeneas; and she told him to turn toward Carthage, and without delay vanished out of his sight. I could follow Virgil word for word, but it would take entirely too long.

This noble queen named Dido, formerly wife to Sychaeus and fairer than the shining sun, had founded this noble town of Carthage, in which she reigned in such great glory that she was believed to be the flower of all queens in nobility, generosity, and beauty; so much so that anyone would be well who had seen her just once. She was so desired by kings and lords that her beauty had inflamed all the world, so well stood she in grace with every creature.

When Aeneas had come to that place, secretly he made his way to the chief temple of the whole town, where Dido was at her devotions. When he was come into the broad temple, I cannot say if it would be possible, but Venus made him invisible. Thus says the book, I promise you. And when Aeneas and Achates had been

36 Explicit legenda Tesbe. Here ends the legend of Thisbe.
37 Incipit Legenda Didonis martiris, Cartaginis Regine. Here begins the Legend of Dido, Martyr.
Geoffrey Chaucer - The Legend of Good Women

over this entire temple, they found painted on a wall how Troy and all the land had been destroyed. 1014

“Alas, that I was born!” said Aeneas, “our shame is known so far over the entire world that now it is depicted on every side. We who were in prosperity are now defamed, and that so grievously that I care to live no longer.” And with these words he burst out weeping so tenderly that it was pitiful to behold. 1026

This lovely lady, queen of the city, stood in the temple in royal state, so splendid and so fair, so young, so joyous, with her glad eyes, that, if the god who made heaven and earth had desired a love, for beauty and goodness and womanhood and seemliness and fidelity, whom should he have loved but this sweet lady? There was no woman half so fitting. 1034

Fortune, that governs the world, speedily brought in so strange a chance that never yet was there so rare a case. For all the company of Aeneas, which he deemed had been lost in the sea, came to shore not far from that city. Therefore some of the greatest of his lords by chance came to the city to that same temple to seek the queen and entreat her for aid, for such renown of her goodness had spread. And when they had related all their distress, and their tempest and their hard case, Aeneas showed himself to the queen and freely told who he was. Then who were more joyful than his men, who had found their lord, their ruler? 1043

The queen saw how they did him such honor, and had often heard of Aeneas before that, and in her heart she had pity and woe that ever so noble a man had so lost his heritage. And she beheld the man, that he was like a knight, and well endowed in person and strength, and likely to be a courteous man, and was fair of his speech, and had a noble face, and was well formed in brawn and bone. For, taking after Venus, he had such fairness that no man could be half so fair, I believe. And he well seemed to be a lord. And because he was a stranger she liked him somewhat better; as--God save us--to some people a new thing is often sweet. Before long her heart pitted his woe, and with that pity love also came; and thus out of pity and courtesy he would need to be comforted in his distress. 1060

She said, surely, that she was sorry that he had had such peril and such mishap. And in her friendly speech she spoke to him thus and said as you may hear: “Are you not the son of Venus and Anchises? In good faith, you shall have all the worship and assistance that I can rightly give you. Your ships and your followers I will protect.” She spoke many courteous words and commanded her messengers to go that same day without fail to seek his ships and fill them with provisions; she sent many beasts to the ships, and presented them with wine as well. And she rushed to her royal palace, and she always had Aeneas near her. 1081

What need is there to describe the feast to you? He was never better at ease in his life. The festival was well provided with dainties and with splendor, with instruments of music, song and gladness; and many were the amorous glances and schemes. Aeneas had come into Paradise out of the mouth of hell; and thus in bliss he recalled his state in Troy. After the meal, Aeneas was led to dancing-halls, full of fine hangings and rich couches and ornaments. And when he had sat down with the queen, and spices had been served and wine passed around, he was led before long to his chambers, to take his ease and have his rest, and all his men likewise, to do just as they wished. 1097

There was no well bridled war horse, nor fine jousting steed, nor large easy-to-ride palfrey, nor jewel adorned all over with rich gems, nor fully weighted sacks full of gold, nor any ruby that shone by night, nor noble high-flying falcon for hunting herons, nor hound for hart or wild boar or deer, nor cup of gold, nor florins newly coined, which could be procured in the land of Libya, that Dido did not send to Aeneas. And all that he would have spent she paid. Thus could this honorable queen call upon her guests as one who knew how to surpass all in generosity. 1113

Aeneas, truly, sent also unto his ship by Achates for his son, and for rich gear, including scepter, clothes, brooches and rings as well, some to wear, and some to present to her who had given him all these noble things. And he told his son to make the presentation and take the gift to the queen. This Achates returned, and Aeneas was eager and glad to see his young son Ascanius. But nevertheless, our author tells us, that Cupid, who is the god of Love, at the prayer of his mother on high had taken on the likeness of the child, to enamor this noble queen of Aeneas. (But as to that text, be it as it may, I pay no attention to it. But true it is that the queen made such to-do about this child that it is wondrous to hear of; and with good will she thanked him often for the gift that his father sent. 1149

Thus was the queen in delight and joy with all these new, pleasant people of Troy. And she further inquired about the deeds of Aeneas, and learned the entire story of Troy. And the two of them decided to converse and amuse themselves all long day. From this there was bred such a flame that luckless Dido had such a strong desire to become intimate with her new guest Aeneas that she lost her color and her health as well. 1159
Now for the conclusion, the fruit of it all, the reason I have told this story, and shall continue it. Thus I begin; it happened one night, when the moon had lifted up her beams, that this noble queen went to her rest, sighed sorely, and tormented herself; she waked and tossed, started up many times as lovers usually do, as I have heard. And at last she made her moan to her sister Anna, and spoke thus: “Now, my dear sister, what can it be that makes me so aghast in my dream? This Trojan is so in my thoughts, because it seems to me he is so well formed and so likely to be a worthy man, and know so much goodness as well, that all my love and life lie in his keeping. Have you not heard him tell of his adventures? Now surely, Anna, if you counsel me so, I would gladly be wedded to him. This is all; what more should I say? In him it all lies, to make me live or die.” 1181

Her sister Anna, as she saw her advantage, spoke as she thought and somewhat withstood her; but at this point there was so much discourse that it would be too long to retell. To sum it all up, the thing could not be withstood; love will love, it will hold back for no person. The dawn arose out of the sea; this amorous queen charged her attendants to prepare the nets and the spears broad and sharp. She wished to go hunting, this lusty, lovely queen, as this new sweet pain urged her. 1192

On horse went all her lusty company, the hounds were led to the courtyard, and upon chargers swift as thought her young knights hovered all around, and a huge company of her women as well. Upon a stout palfrey white as paper, with a red saddle adorned delightfully, clearly embossed with bars of gold, sat Dido all covered with gold and gems, and she as fair as the moon that heals the sick of the night’s sorrow. 1209

And thus I let this noble queen ride forth in her hunting, with this Trojan by her. The herd of harts was found before long, with “Ho! Faster! Spur on! Loose the dogs! Loose them! Why won’t the lion come, or the bear, that I might meet him once with this spear?” Thus cried these young people, and on they went killing all these wild harts, and had them as they wished. 1217

Amid all this the heavens began to rumble, the thunder roared with grisly voice; down came the rain thick with hail and sleet and heaven’s fire; so sorely it frightened this noble queen and her attendants as well that each was glad to flee away. And in brief, to save her from the tempest she fled into a little cave, and with her went Aeneas also. I know not if any more went with them; the author makes no mention of that. 1228

And here began the deep devotion between the two of them; this was the first morning of their gladness, and the beginning of their sorrow. For there Aeneas so kneeled, and told her all his heart and his pain, and swore so deeply to be true to her in happiness or in woe, and to exchange her for no other—as a false lover so well knows how to make his plaint—that hapless Dido pitied his woe, and took him for a husband, to be his wife for evermore so long as they should live. And after this, when the tempest ceased, they came out in joy and went home. 1241

Evil Rumor arose, and arose quickly, how Aeneas had gone with the queen into the cave. And people judged as they wished. And when the king named Yrbas knew of it, since he had always loved her and wooed her, to win her as his wife, he made such sorrow and sad expressions that it was pitiful and heart-rending to see. But in love it happens ever so, that one shall laugh at another’s sorrow; now Aeneas laughs, and is in more bliss and wealth than ever he was in Troy. 1253

O unfortunate woman, innocent, full of pity, faith, and tenderness, why did you so trust men? Had you such pity upon their pretended woe, even though you had before you so many old examples? Do you not see how they all perjured themselves? Where do you see one who has not forsaken his beloved or been unkind or done to her some mischief or robbed her or boasted of his acts to her? You can see this as well as you can read it. 1263

Take heed now of this great gentleman, this Trojan, who so well knew how to please her, who pretended to be so true and yielding, so courteous and so discreet in his deeds; who knew so well how to perform all due observances, and attend her pleasure at dances and feasts and when she went to the temple and back again home; and who fasted until he had seen his lady, and wore in his heraldic devices I know not what for her sake; and who would compose songs, and joust and do many deeds at arms, and send her letters, tokens, brooches, rings. Now hear how he shall serve his lady! After he had been in peril of death from hunger and misadventures on the sea, and desolate, fugitive from his country, and all his company scattered by the tempest, she gave her body and her realm as well into his hand, when she might have been a queen of another land besides Carthage and lived in sufficiency of joy. What more would you want? 1284
This Aeneas, who had vowed so deeply, was weary of the business before long, and his hot earnestness had all blown by. Secretly he had his ships prepared and planned to steal away by night. This Dido suspected it and well thought that all was not right; for in the night he lay in his bed and sighed. Without delay she asked him what displeased him: “my dear heart, whom I love best?” 1293

“Surely,” he said, “this night my father’s spirit has so sorely troubled me in my sleep, and Mercury as well has delivered a message, that it is my destiny to sail soon for I must conquer Italy. For this it seems to me my heart is broken” With this his false tears burst forth, and he took her in his two arms. 1302

“To tell it briefly, this noble Queen Dido sought shrines and made sacrifices; she knelt and cried so that it is pitiful to relate. She implores him and offers to be his slave, his servant of the lowest rank. She fell at his feet and swooned, her shining golden hair disheveled, and cried, “Have mercy! Let me go with you! These lords who are my neighbors will destroy me, only because of you. And, so you will take me now as your wife, as you have sworn, then I will give you leave to slay me with your sword right now this evening, for then I shall die wedded to you. I am with child: grant my child life! Mercy, lord! Have pity in your thought!” 1324

But all this was to no avail for her; for one night he let her lie sleeping and stole away to his followers, and as a traitor he sailed forth toward the great land of Italy. Thus he left Dido in woe and pain; and there he wedded a lady named Lavinia. 1331

He left a garment and his sword also standing right at the head of her bed, when he stole away from Dido in her sleep, so he hastened to reach his ships. This garment, when hapless Dido awoke, she kissed often for his sake, and said, “O you garment, so sweet while it pleased Jupiter, take my soul now, unbind me from this unrest! I have run through the whole course of fortune.” And then she swooned twenty times, without any aid from Aeneas. And when she had made her lament to her sister Anna—of which I cannot write, such pity I have to tell of it—she bade her nurse and her sister to go fetch fire and other things right away, and said she wished to make a sacrifice. And when she saw her time, she leaped on the sacrificial fire, and with his sword she stabbed herself to the heart. 1350

But before she was wounded, before she died, she said this, as my author tells; she wrote a letter without delay, which began in this way: “Just as the white swan,” she said, “begins to sing against the time of his death, so to you I make my lament; not that I hope to get you back, for well I know that is all in vain, because the gods are contrary to me. But since my good name is lost through you, I may well lose a word or a message upon you, albeit I shall be never better for that. For the same wind that blew away your ship has blown away your good faith.” But whosoever wishes to know this entire letter, let him read Ovid; there he shall find it. 1367

Explicit Legenda Didonis Martiris, Cartaginis Regine39.

IV. The Legend of Hypsipyle and Medea

Incipit Legenda Ysiphile et Medee, martirum40.

Duke Jason, you root of false lovers, you sly devourer and ruin of high-born women, tender creatures! You set your lures and your enticements for ladies with your stately appearance and your words stuffed with pleasantness, and your pretended fidelity, and your manner, and your obsequiousness and your humble bearing, and your counterfeited woe and pain. Where others are false to one, you are false to two! Ah, often did you swear you would perish for love, when you felt no illness except foul delight, which you call love! As long as I live, your name shall be spread far in English, so that your deceitfulness shall be known! Take that, Jason! 1383

Now the horn for the hunt is blown for you! But surely it is both a pity and woe that love so works with false lovers; for they shall find better love and better manners than he who has paid for his love dearly, or has had many bloody blows in fight. For the fox shall eat just as tender a capon, though he may be false and have deceived the fowl, as the head of the household shall, who has paid for that. Although he may have claim to the capon in reason and justice, the false fox will get his share in the dark. This example well fits

39 Explicit Legenda Didonis Martiris, Cartaginis Regine. Here ends the Legend of Dido, Martyr, Queen of Carthage.
40 Incipit Legenda Ysiphile et Medee, martirum. Here begins the Legend of Hypsipyle and Medea.
Jason, as he dealt with Hypsipyle and with Medea the queen. 1395

In Thessaly, as Guido 41 tells us, was a king named Pelias, who had a brother named Aeson; and when he could scarcely walk on account of his age, he gave Pelias the rule of his entire realm, and made him lord and king. Of this Aeson was begotten Jason, in whose time there was not in all that land a knight so renowned for gentility, nobility, strength, and vigor. After his father’s death he so bore himself that there was nobody who cared to be his foe, but gave him all his honor and sought after him. 1408

At this Pelias had great envy, imagining that Jason might be so exalted and put in such position by the love of the lords of his realm that he might remove him from his own throne. And in his mind by night he plotted how Jason might best be destroyed, without a scandal concerning his plot. And at last he determined to send him into some far country, where this Jason might perish. This was his devious plan, though he showed Jason all affection and loving appearance, lest his lords should detect the plan. 1422

Now it so happened, since fame spreads widely, that there were great tidings everywhere and many reports that in an island called Colchis, eastward in the sea beyond Troy, men might see a ram that had a fleece of gold so shining that nowhere was there another such sight. But it was always guarded by a dragon and many other marvels all around, and by two bulls made entirely of brass, which spat fire; and many other things were there. But nevertheless this was the tale, that whosoever wished to win that fleece, before he could win it, must fight both the bulls and the dragon. And king Aeëtes was lord of that island. 1438

This Pelias contemplated this plot, to exhort his nephew Jason to sail to that land to entertain himself. And so he said, “Nephew, if such an honor might come to you as to win this famous treasure and bring it into my land, it would be a great pleasure and honor to me. Then would I be bound to requite your labor. And I myself will pay all the expenses. Choose what people you will take with you. Let us see now, do you dare to take this voyage?” 1450

Jason was young and eager at heart, and undertook this enterprise. Soon Argus designed his ships. With Jason went the mighty Hercules, and many others whom he chose as well. But whosoever will ask who went with Jason, let him go read *Argonauticon*, for that will tell a tale that is long enough. Quickly Philoctetes hoisted the sail, when the wind was favorable, and they hastened themselves out of their country of Thessaly. Long they sailed the salty sea, until they arrived at the isle of Lemnos (albeit this is not related by Guido, yet Ovid in his Epistles says this), and of this isle the lady and queen was the fair young Hypsipyle, the shining-bright, who was daughter to Thoas, once the king. 1468

Hypsipyle was walking to entertain herself and, roaming upon the cliffs by the sea, before long she discovered where under a bank the ship of Jason had arrived. In her goodness she sent down speedily to know if any stranger had been blown there by storm during the night, that she might bring him aid, as it was her custom to assist every creature and do kindnesses from her very kindness and courtesy. This messenger hurried down and came upon Jason and Hercules as well, who had arrived on land in a small boat, refreshing themselves and catching their breath. The morning was mild and fine. And on his way the messenger met these two lords and very discreetly greeted them and gave his message, asking them without delay if they were damaged or in any way distressed, or had need of a pilot or food; for they should in no way lack aid, since aid was wholly the queen’s will. 1490

Jason answered mildly and gently; he said, “I heartily thank my lady for her goodness; truly, we need nothing now, except that we are weary and have left the sea to entertain ourselves until the wind blows nearer our course.” 1496

This lady was roaming with her attendants along the shore by the cliff to entertain herself, and found this Jason and the other standing speaking of their business, as I have said. This Hercules and Jason beheld how this lady was the queen, and greeted her fairly as soon as they had met her. And she noted well, and knew by their fashion, by their array and words and looks, that they were men of noble birth and high degree. And she led these strangers to the castle with her, and did them great honor, and asked them about their labor and travail on the salty sea; so that within one day or two she knew from the people who were in the ships that they were Jason, full of renown, and Hercules, of great praise, that sought the adventures of Colchis. And she did them more honor than before, and the more time passed, the more she had to do with them, for in very truth they were worthy people. And she spoke most with Hercules; to him her heart inclined, for he seemed to be steadfast, wise, true, discreet of speech, and without any other attachment in love, or evil fancies. 1523

41 Guido. Guido delle Collone’s Historia destructionis Troiae.
This Hercules so praised Jason that he exalted him to the sun, saying that there was not under the high canopy of heaven a man half so true in love; and he was wise, hardy, trusty, and rich. And in three more points there was none like him: in liberality and energy he surpassed all men, living or dead, and he was also truly nobly born and likely to be king of Thessaly. There was no fault, except that he was afraid of love, and shy in speech; he would rather murder himself and die than have men find him out to be a lover. “Would to almighty God I could give my flesh and blood, my will with women of gentle blood, this was all his delight and felicity. 1588

Jason roamed forth to the town which once was called Jaconitos, which was the chief city of all Colchis; and he told the cause for his coming to Aeëtes, king of that land, praying him that he might have his trial to win the golden fleece if he could. To this petition the king agreed, and did him honor, as was fitting; and so much that he caused his daughter and heir Medea, who was so wise and beautiful that never did a man see with his eyes a fairer woman, to keep Jason company at his meal and sit by him in the hall. Now Jason was a proper and lordly man, and had great renown, and regal as a lion in his demeanor, and pleasant and courteous in his speech, and knew without any book the trade and art of love entirley, and every ceremony of it. And as Fortune owed Medea a foul misfortune, she she enamored of this man. 1610

“My true lady,” then said Jason, “that you have any regard for my death or woe and do me this honor, I know well that my might and my travail cannot earn it all the days of my life. May God thank you, for I never can. I am your man, and humbly pray you, without more speech, to be my help; but surely I shall not hold back for fear of death.” 1628

Then this Medea made known to him from point to point the peril of the adventure and of his battle, and in what unequal combat he must stand, in which no creature except she alone could assure him of his life. And, to go shortly to the point, they were agreed between the two of them that Jason should wed her as a true knight. And the time was set for him to come in the evening to her chamber, and there take oaths by the gods that never for joy or woe, night or day, would he falsely fail her; that he would be husband as long as he lived to her who here had saved him from death. And on this they met by night, and he took his oath and went to bed. And in the morning he hastened to arise, for she had taught him how he could not fail to win the fleece and achieve success in the conflict; and thus she saved his life and his honor and got him a great name.

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42 Fortune owed Medea a foul misfortune. Presumably because she had good fortune to that point.
as a conqueror, even through the wiles of her enchantment. 1650

Now Jason had the fleece, and returned home with Medea and a great store of treasure. But it was unknown to her father that she went to Thessaly with Duke Jason her dear, who afterwards brought mischief upon her. For like a traitor he left her, and left with her his two young children, and falsely betrayed her, alas! Forever was he a chief of traitors in love and soon he wedded yet a third wife, the daughter of King Creon. 1661

This is the payment and reward that Medea received from Jason, even for her fidelity and kindness, as she loved him better than herself, I believe, and left her father and her heritage for him. And this is the prowess of Jason, that in his days no lover so false was found walking on earth. And therefore in her letter she began thus, when she upbraided him for his falseness: “Why did it please me more to look on your yellow hair than on the boundaries of my honor? Why did your youth and comeliness please me, and the infinite graciousness of your tongue! Ah, had you died in your adventure, how much faithlessness would have died with you!” Well can Ovid compose her letter in verse, which would be too long for me to include here now. 1679

Explicit Legenda Ysiphile et Medee, Martirum.43

V. The Legend Of Lucrece

Incipit Legenda Lucrecie Rome, Martiris.44

Now I must speak of the exile of kings of Rome by reason of their horrible deeds, and of the last king, Tarquin, as Ovid and Titus Livy relate. But it is not for that reason I tell this tale, but to praise and remember that true wife, the faithful Lucrece, for whose true wifehood and steadfastness not only do these pagans extol her but also he who is called in our legends the great Augustine has great pity for this Lucrece, who died in Rome. And of the manner of her death I will treat but briefly, and touch upon only the important matter of this thing. 1693

When Ardea was besieged with Romans who were stern and stout, long lay the siege and accomplished little, so that they lay there half idle, as they judged.

And in his sport the young Tarquin began to jest, for he was loose tongued, and said that this was an idle existence, for no man there did more than his wife; “And let us speak of wives; that would be best. Let every man praise his own as it pleases him, and let us ease our hearts with converse.” 1704

A knight named Collatine arose and spoke thus: “Nay, there is no need to rely on words, but on deeds. I have a wife,” he said, “who is held to be good by all who know her. Let us go to Rome tonight and see.” 1710

Tarquinius answered, “That is good.” 1711

To Rome Tarquin and Collatine came and quickly went to the house of Collatine, and alighted. The husband well knew the whole shape of the house, and secretly they entered in, for there was no porter at the gate, and at the chamber-door they stopped. This noble wife sat beside her bed with hair unbound, for she suspected no harm. And she was working soft wool, our book says, to keep her from sloth and idleness, and she told her servants to perform their duties, and asked them, “What news do you hear? What do men say men of the siege and how it shall end? Would to God the walls would fall! My husband has been so long away from this town; for this reason the dread so sorely pains me, it stings to my heart just like a sword, when I think of the siege or of that place. God save my lord, I pray, in His mercy.” 1731

And at that she wept tenderly and paid no more attention to her work, but meekly let her eyes fall. And this demeanor well became her. And her tears, full of virtue, embellished her wifely chastity. Her look was worthy of her heart, for they accorded in sign and in truth. And at her words Collatine her husband came bursting in, before she was aware of him, and cried, “Fear not, for I am here!” And immediately she rose up with blissful countenance, and kissed him, as wives use to do. 1744

Tarquin, this proud king’s son, considered her beauty and her demeanor, her yellow hair, her form, her manner, her hue, her words of lament, and saw that her beauty was not feigned by any artfulness. And he conceived such desire for this lady that it burned in his heart like a flame, so furiously that his wits were entirely forgotten. For he well imagined that she could never be won; and thus he was continually in greater despair, the more he coveted her and thought of her loveliness. His blind lust was all his covetousness. 1756

In the morning, when birds began to sing, he returned secretly to the camp and walked sadly by himself, ever

43 Explicit Legenda Ysiphile et Medee, Martirum. Here ends the Legend of Hypsipyle and Medea.
44 Incipit Legenda Lucrecie Rome, Martiris. Here begins the Legend of Lucretia of Rome, Martyr.
freshly recalling her image: “Thus lay her hair, and so
fresh was her hue. Thus she sat, thus spoke, thus spun.
This was her look, this fair was she, and this was her
demeanor.” His heart has now received all this thought.
And as the sea, all tossed with a tempest, will yet heave
for a day or two after the storm has all departed, so too,
though her form was absent, yet the pleasure of it was
present--but not pleasure, but rather evil delight or an
unrighteous desire with evil intent. “For in spite of
herself she shall be my mistress,” he said; “chance
always helps the hardy. However it ends, it shall be
done.” 1774

And he buckled on his sword and departed, and rode
forth until he arrived at Rome, and all by himself took
his way straight to the house of Collatine. The sun was
down, and the day had lost its light. And in he came to
a secret corner, and in the night stole out like a thief,
when everyone had gone to their rest and none had a
thought of such treachery. Whether it was by window
or other sly means, he quickly entered in and with
sword drawn came speedily where she lay, this noble
wife Lucrece. And as she awoke she felt her bed
pressed down. “What beast is that,” she said, “weighs
down my bed thus?” 1756

“I am the king’s son Tarquin,” he said; “but if you cry
out or make a noise, or awake any creature, by that
God who formed man alive, I shall thrust this sword
through your heart.” And at that he leaped at her throat
and set the sharp point on her heart. 1774

She spoke no word, she had no strength; what should
she say? Her wit had entirely fled. Just as when a wolf
finds a solitary lamb, to whom should she lament or
make moan? What! Shall she struggle against a hardy
knight? Men well know a woman has no strength.
What! Shall she cry? How shall she escape him who
has her by the throat, with his sword at her heart? She
begged for mercy, and said all she could. 1788

“If you yield not,” he said, this cruel man, “so surely
may Jupiter save my soul, as I will slay your groom
in the stable and lay him in your bed, and raise the alarm
and openly had her carried on a bier through the entire
town, so that men might see and learn the horrible deed
of her violation. And never since that day was ther e a
like would be bare, so well she loved purity and
fidelity. 1860

All the town of Rome felt pity for her, and Brutus
swore by her chaste blood that for that deed Tarquin
should be banished, and all his kinsfolk; and he had the
people summoned, and openly told the tale to them a ll,
and openly had her carried on a bier through the entire
town, so that men might see and learn the horrible deed
of her violation. And never since that day was there a
king in Rome; and she was held there to be a saint, and
her day was always dearly worshipped in their law.
1872

And thus ended Lucrece the noble wife, as Titus
Livy45 bears witness. I tell the tale because she was so
faithful in love, and never by her will changed to any
new lover, and for the sake of the constant heart,
steadfast and kind, which men may ever feel in these
women; where they set their heart, there it remains. For
well I know Christ himself tells that in all Israel, broad

45 Livy. See note near line 287.
though the land may be, he found not so great faith as in a woman; and this is no lie. And as for men, look what tyrannical deeds they do every day. Test them who may wish: the truest is entirely fickle to trust.

1885

\textit{Explicit Legenda Lucrecie Rome, Martiris.}\footnote{Faith as in a woman. Likely refers to Matthew 15.28 in which a woman whose daughter is tormented by a demon persists in asking Christ’s aid, to the effect that he heals her.}

VI. The Legend of Ariadne

\textit{Incipit Legenda Adriane de Athenes.}\footnote{Explicit Legenda Lucrecie Rome, Martiris. Here ends the Legend of Lucretia of Rome, Martyr.}

You Judge in Hell, Minos, lord of Crete, now your turn comes; now you come into the ring! Not for your sake only do I write this history, but to call to mind once more the great untruth in love of you, Theseus, for which the gods of high heaven are angered and have taken vengeance for your guilt; may you grow red with shame! Now I begin your life. 1893

Minos, great king of Crete, who had a hundred great and strong cities, sent his son Androgeus to school at Athens; where it happened that while he was learning philosophy he was slain in that very city, for no reason but envy. The great Minos, of whom I speak, came to avenge his son’s death. Long and hotly he laid siege to Alcathoe. Nevertheless, the walls were so strong, and Nisus, king of that city, was so knightly, that he feared little; he took no heed of Minos or his army until one day the chance arose that the daughter of Nisus stood on the wall and saw all the manner of the siege. It so happened that, watching a skirmish, she set her heart so sorely upon Minos the king for his beauty and his chivalry that she thought she must die. And, to hasten over this long story, she caused Minos to win that place and to have the city all at his will, to save or destroy whom he wished. But he repaid wickedly for her kindness, and would have left her drowning in sorrow and woe, had not the gods had pity upon her. But that story would be too long for me now. 1921

This King Minos also won Athens, and Alcathoe and other towns. And this was the outcome: that Minos so harshly pressed the people of Athens that from year to year they had to give him their own beloved children to be slain, as you shall hear. This Minos had a monster, an evil beast, so cruel that, when a man was brought to him, without pause he would devour him; no defense could help. And truly every third year they cast lots, and as the lot fell, on the rich man or the poor, he had to give up his son and present him to Minos to be saved or destroyed, or let his beast devour him at his will. And Minos did this out of hatred; all his pleasure was set to avenge his son and to make the people of Athens his slaves from year to year as long as he should live. And when this town was won he sailed home. 1942

This evil custom continued a long time, until Aegeus, king of Athens, had to send his own son Theseus, since the lot fell upon him, to be devoured, for there was no reprieve. And this woeful young knight was led forth straight to the court of King Minos and was cast into a prison, until the time when he would be devoured. 1951

Well may you weep, woeful Theseus, who is the king’s son, thus condemned! It seems to me you were deeply indebted to any who should save you from cold troubles. And now if any woman should help you, well ought you to be her slave and true lover year by year. But now to return to my tale. 1959

The tower where this Theseus was cast, down in the dark bottom, extremely deep, adjoined the wall of an outer chamber belonging to the two daughters of King Minos, who in much mirth and joy and comfort dwelt in their great chambers above, toward the chief street. By chance, I know not how, it happened that as Theseus was making his complaint one night, the king’s daughter, named Ariadne, and her sister Phaedra, for his assistance the best counsel I know is that we cause the jailer to come secretly and speak with us directly, and bring this woeful man with him. For if he could overcome this monster, then he would be free; there is no other remedy. Let us test him well to his heart’s root, whether, if it may be so that he has a weapon, he might

1976

Then Ariadne spoke to her noble sister and said, “Phaedra, dear sweet sister, can you not hear this woeful lord’s son, how piteously he laments his kindness, and the wretched plight he is in, and being entirely guiltless? Now surely, it is a pity. And if you will assent, by my faith he should be helped, however we can!” 1984

Phaedra answered, “Certainly I am as sorry for him as ever I was for any man; and for his assistance the best counsel I know is that we cause the jailer to come secretly and speak with us directly, and bring this woeful man with him. For if he could overcome this monster, then he would be free; there is no other remedy. Let us test him well to his heart’s root, whether, if it may be so that he has a weapon, he might
dare to fight this fiend and defend himself, to keep and save his life. For you well know that in the prison where he must descend, the beast is in a place that is not dark, and he has room to wield an axe or a sword or staff or knife; so it seems to me he ought to save himself. If he is a man he will do so. And we shall also make him balls of wax and flax, that when the beast fiercely opens his mouth, he shall cast them into his throat, to encumber his teeth and satisfy his hunger.

And as soon as Theseus shall see the beast choke, he shall leap on him to slay him before they can come any closer together. This weapon the jailer shall hide, before that time, secretly within the prison. And because that dwelling-place winds much in and out, and has such intricate paths—for it is shaped like a maze, and for this I have in mind a remedy—that by means of a ball of twine he may directly return the way he went, following the thread continually. And when he has overcome the beast, then he may flee away from this horror and can take the jailer with him, and advance him at home in his country, since he is son of so great a lord. This is my counsel, if he should dare to take it.” 2025

Why should I make a longer story? The jailer came, and Theseus with him; and when all was thus agreed, down fell Theseus upon his knee before Ariadne: “True lady of my life,” he said, “I, a sorrowful man, condemned to die, will not part from you, after this stroke of fortune, so long as I have life or breath, but I will thus remain in your service, so that as an unknown outcast I will serve you forevermore, until my heart shall die. I will forsake my own heritage, and, as I said, be a page of your court, if you stoop to grant me so great a grace to have my meat and drink here; and for my sustenance I will still labor just as you will have it, so that not Minos, who never saw me with the sight of his eyes, nor any other man, shall be able to recognize me, so cunningly and well shall I bear myself and so skillfully and wretchedly disguise myself, so that I shall be detected by no man in this world. 2046

“This I will do to preserve my life and to remain in the presence of you, who do me this excellent kindness. And I will send this worthy man here, now the jailer, to my father, and for reward he shall be one of the greatest men of my country. And if I yet dare say it, my fair lady, I am a king’s son, and a knight. Would to God, if it could be, that you were in my land, all three of you, and I with you to bear you company, then you would see if I lie about this. And if I offer you humbly to be your page and serve you here, if I should not serve you as humbly there I pray to Mars to grant me such favor that a shameful death may there fall upon me, and death and poverty upon all my friends; and that after my death my spirit may roam by night and walk to and fro; and that I may have the shameful name of traitor, by reason of which may my spirit walk! And if I ever claim higher station, unless you stoop to give it to me, may I die a shameful death, as I have said! Have mercy, lady! I can say nothing else!” 2073

Theseus was a handsome knight to behold, and young, only twenty-three years old. Whosoever had seen his countenance would have wept for pity of his woe. Therefore this Ariadne in this way answered to his offer and his appealing look: “For a king’s son,” she said, “and a knight as well to serve me in such a low degree, may God forbid it, for the shame of all women; and may God grant me such a thing may never happen, but send you grace and cunning of heart to defend yourself and slay your foe in knightly fashion; and may God grant hereafter that I may find you so kind to me and to my sister here that I regret not to have saved you from death! Yet it would be better if I were your wife, since you are as gently born as I and have a kingdom not far from here, than that I should allow you to die guiltless or let you serve as a page. It is not a reasonable offer for one of your kindred, but what is it that a man will not do for fear? As for my sister, since it is so that she must go with me if I depart, or else suffer death, and I too, arrange for her to be faithfully wedded to your son at your home-coming. This is the final end of this thing. Swear to it here, by all that may be sworn on. 2102

“Yes, my lady,” he said, “or else may I be entirely torn to pieces by the Minotaur tomorrow! And here take my heart’s blood in pledge, if you will; if I had a knife or spear, I would let it out and vow upon it, for I know only then you will believe me. By Mars, who is chief in my creed, so I may live and not fail tomorrow to achieve my battle, I would never flee from this place until you should see the very proof of my words. For now if I am to tell the truth to you, in my own country I have loved you for many days, though you knew it not, and most desired to see you of any earthly creature living. By my faith I swear and assure you that for these seven years I have been your servant. Now I have you, and you also have me, my dear heart, Duchess of Athens!” 2122

This lady smiled at his steadfastness, and at his earnest words and his look, and spoke all softly to her sister in this way. “Now my sister,” she said, “now we are duchesses, both you and I, and assured of royal rank in Athens, and both likely to be queens afterwards; and we have saved from his death a king’s son, as it is ever the custom of well-born women to save a man of gentle blood if they can, in an honest cause, and most of all if he is in the right. It seems to me that no person ought to blame us for this, nor give us an evil name.” 2135
And to explain this matter briefly, Theseus took leave of her, and every point in this covenant was carried out as you have heard me relate. His weapon, his ball of flax, all the things that I have named, were laid by the jailer right in the house where this Minotaur had his dwelling, near the door where Theseus should enter. And Theseus was led to his death, and he came forth to this Minotaur, and following the instruction of Ariadne he overcame the beast and slew him; and by the ball of flax he came out again secretly when he had slain the beast. 2149

Through the jailer he got a barge and loaded it with his wife’s treasure, and he took his wife and her fair sister, and the jailer as well, and with all three of them stole away from the land by night, and turned toward the land of Oenopia, where he had a familiar friend. There they feasted and danced and sang. And he had in his arms this Ariadne who had preserved him from the beast. Soon he got himself another ship there, and a great number of his countrymen as well, took his leave, and sailed homeward. 2162

And on an island amid the wild sea, where there dwelt no creature save wild beasts, and many of them, he brought his ship ashore. And he remained on that island half a day, and he said must rest himself on land, and his mariners did as he desired. And, to tell the matter briefly, while Ariadne his wife lay sleeping, because her sister was fairer than she, he took Phaedra by the hand and forth he went to ship, and like a traitor stole off, while this Ariadne still slept. And toward his country he swiftly sailed—-may the wind drive him to twenty devils!--and found his father drowned in the sea. 2178

I wish to speak no more of him, in faith. These false lovers, may poison be their destruction! But I will return to Ariadne, who for weariness was overtaken with sleep. So sorrowfully her heart may awaken! Alas! Now my heart has pity for you! Right at dawn she awakes and gropes in the bed and found nothing. “Alas!” she said, “that ever I was created! I am betrayed!” And she rent her hair, and hastened barefoot to the shore, and cried, “Theseus! My sweet heart! Where are you—that I cannot find you and may be slain thus by beasts?” 2192

The hollow rocks answered her; she saw no man. And the moon still shone, and high upon a rock she climbed speedily, and saw his barge sailing in the sea. Her heart grew cold and she said, “Milder than you I find the wild beasts!” Had he who thus betrayed her not sinned? “O, return,” she cried, “for the pity and sin of it! Your ship does not have all its crew!” She stuck her kerchief up on a pole, in case he should indeed see it and remember that she was left and return and find her on the shore. But she did this all for nothing; he had gone his way. And down she fell swooning on a stone; and she arose, and in all her sorrow she kissed the prints of his feet where he had passed. 2209

And then she spoke in this way to her bed: “You bed,” she said, “which has received two, you shall answer for two, and not for one only! Where has your greater part gone? Alas, what will become of me, wretched creature! Even if a ship or a boat should come here, I dare not for fear go home to my country. I cannot counsel myself in this situation!” 2217

Why should I tell more of her lament? It was so long, it would be a heavy thing to tell; Ovid records all in Ariadne’s epistle. But I shall tell it quickly to the end. The gods helped her, out of pity; and in the sign of Taurus men may see the gems of her crown shining brightly. I will speak no more of this tale; but this is how this false lover could beguile his true love. May the devil repay him for his trouble! 2227

Explicit Legenda Adriane de Athenes. 50

VII. The Legend of Philomela

Incipit Legenda Philomene.

Deus dator formarum. 51

You giver of its forms to matter, who has created the beautiful world, and eternally bore it in your mind before you did begin your work, why did you make to the shame of man--or even if it were not your doing to create such a thing for that end--why did you allow Tereus to be born, who was so false and deceitful in love that when people mention his name, all things from this world up to the highest heaven are corrupted? So grisly was his act that, as for me, when I read his foul story, my eyes grew foul and sore. Even now the venom of so long ago lasts and infects any who will behold the story of Tereus of whom I tell. 2243

49 Taurus. Chaucer tampers with this part of the tale. In sympathy Bacchus places the crown of Ariadne on in the heavens as the Corona Borealis (Northern Crown) constellation. As it is opposite Taurus, it shows brightly when the sun is in Taurus. 50 Explicit Legenda Adriane de Athenes. 51 Incipit Legenda Philomene. Deus dator formarum. Here begins the Legend of Philomela. God is the giver of forms. The latter is a quote from Plato.
He was lord of Thrace, and kin to the cruel god Mars, who stands with bloody spear. And with blissful cheer he had wedded King Pandion’s fair sweet daughter, who was named Procne, the flower of her country (though Juno cared not to be at the festival, nor Hymen, who is the god of marriage; but ready at the feast, in truth, were the three furies with their deadly torch; the owl, prophet of woe and misfortune, all night fluttered among the roof-beams). The revels, with much singing and dancing, lasted a fortnight or a little less. 2256

But to pass soon over this history, for I am weary to tell of him, five years he and his wife lived together, until one day she began to yearn so sorely to see her sister, whom she had not seen for a long while, that for her desire she did not know what to say. But she begged her husband for God’s love that she might once go to see her sister and return directly; or else, if she could not go to her sister, Procne asked him to send after her. And this was continually her petition day by day, with all wisely meekness in word and expression. 2269

This Tereus had his ships made ready, and fared forth, so that by the time the year was all gone, she had woven on a large woolen cloth how she had been brought in a ship from Athens, and taken into a cave; and at that she wept tenderly, and trembled with fear, pale and piteous just like the lamb that is bitten by the wolf; or like the dove stricken by the eagle, that escapes from his claws, yet is dazed and afraid lest it be seized again, even so she sat. But it could not be otherwise, this was all: by force this betrayer did his deed, all in spite of her. Lo! Here was a manly deed, and a righteous one! She cried, “Sister!” with a loud voice, and “Father dear!” and “God in heaven, help me!” All of these did not avail her. And this false thief did this lady still more harm, out of fear lest she should cry out his shame and openly disgrace him, and he cut off her tongue with his sword; and in a castle he put her secretly in prison for evermore and kept her in possession, so that she could never escape him. 2338

Ah, hapless Philomela, woeful is your heart! May God avenge you and grant you your prayer! Now it is time I made a brief end. 2341

This Tereus came to his wife and took her in his arms and wept piteously and shook his head, and swore to her he found her sister was no more. At this, the luckless Procne was so woeful that her sorrowful heart nearly broke in two. And thus I leave Procne in her tears, and will tell more about her sister. 2349

This woeful lady had learned in her youth to make embroidery, and in her frame weave tapestry, as women have long been accustomed to do. And, to tell it briefly, she had her fill of food and drink, and clothing at her desire, and could also read and compose a thing well enough, but truly she could not write with a pen; but she knew how to weave letters back and forth, so that by the time the year was all gone, she had woven on a large woolen cloth how she had been brought in a ship from Athens, and taken into a cave; and well she wove all that Tereus had done and composed the story on the top, how she had been treated because she loved her sister. And then she gave a ring to a page, and by signs asked him to go to the queen and take to her that tapestry, and by signs she swore many oaths to him that she would give him whatever she could obtain. 2370

And in truth he made splendid entertainment for him and for his people, great and small, who had come with him; and gave him costly gifts, and conveyed him through the chief street of Athens, and escorted him to the sea, and returned home; Pandion suspected no evil. 2307

The oars speedily pulled the vessel on, and at last it arrived in Thrace. And up into a forest he led her and secretly hastened into a dark cave, and there, whether she wished to remain there or not, he ordered her to remain. At this her heart shuddered, and she said, “Where is my sister, brother Tereus?” 2315

And at that she wept tenderly, and trembled with fear, pale and piteous just like the lamb that is bitten by the wolf; or like the dove stricken by the eagle, that escapes from his claws, yet is dazed and afraid lest it be seized again, even so she sat. But it could not be otherwise, this was all: by force this betrayer did his deed, all in spite of her. Lo! Here was a manly deed, and a righteous one! She cried, “Sister!” with a loud voice, and “Father dear!” and “God in heaven, help me!” All of these did not avail her. And this false thief did this lady still more harm, out of fear lest she should cry out his shame and openly disgrace him, and he cut off her tongue with his sword; and in a castle he put her secretly in prison for evermore and kept her in possession, so that she could never escape him. 2338

Ah, hapless Philomela, woeful is your heart! May God avenge you and grant you your prayer! Now it is time I made a brief end. 2341

This Tereus came to his wife and took her in his arms and wept piteously and shook his head, and swore to her he found her sister was no more. At this, the luckless Procne was so woeful that her sorrowful heart nearly broke in two. And thus I leave Procne in her tears, and will tell more about her sister. 2349

This woeful lady had learned in her youth to make embroidery, and in her frame weave tapestry, as women have long been accustomed to do. And, to tell it briefly, she had her fill of food and drink, and clothing at her desire, and could also read and compose a thing well enough, but truly she could not write with a pen; but she knew how to weave letters back and forth, so that by the time the year was all gone, she had woven on a large woolen cloth how she had been brought in a ship from Athens, and taken into a cave; and well she wove all that Tereus had done and composed the story on the top, how she had been treated because she loved her sister. And then she gave a ring to a page, and by signs asked him to go to the queen and take to her that tapestry, and by signs she swore many oaths to him that she would give him whatever she could obtain. 2370
This page directly went to the queen and gave it her, and told her everything about it. And when Procne beheld this thing, for sorrow and frenzy as well she spoke no word, but pretended to go on a pilgrimage to the temple of Bacchus. And in a little while she found her mute sister sitting weeping all by herself in the castle. Alas, for the woe, lament, and moan that Procne voiced over her dumb sister! Each took the other in her arms; and thus I leave them in their sorrow. 2382

The rest of the story it matters not to tell, for this is the sum of it, that she who never merited the wickedness of this cruel man, nor caused him any harm that she knew of, was treated this way. May you beware of man, if you wish. For albeit he wishes not for shame to act as Tereus did, lest he lose his fair reputation, or treat you as a villain or murderer, yet you shall find him true for only a short time. This I say, even if he were now my own brother--unless it should happen that he can find no new love. 2393

Explicit Legenda Philomene. 54

VIII. The Legend of Phyllis

Incipit Legenda Phillis. 55

By experience as well as authority you may find, if you are willing, that wicked fruit comes from a wicked tree. But I say this now for this end: to tell you of false Demophon; never have I heard of anyone falser in love, unless it were his father Theseus. May God in His mercy keep us from such a one! Thus may those women pray who hear of Demophon. Now I turn to the substance of my tale. 2413

The city of Troy was destroyed. This Demophon came sailing over the sea to Athens, to his broad palace; with him came many ships and barges full of his people, of whom many were sorely wounded and sick and woebegone. And they had lain long at the siege. Behind him came a rain and a wind, and drove him so fiercely that his sails could not withstand it; more than all the world he wished he were ashore, so the tempest hunted him back and forth. It was so dark he could go nowhere, and his steering-gear had been broken by a wave. His ship was destroyed so far below, and in such a way, that no carpenter could mend it. By night the sea glowed wildly, as if it were a torch, and rolled him up and down, until Neptune had compassion on him, as well as Thetis, Thorus, Triton and all the deities of the sea, and let him come upon a shore of which Phyllis was lady and queen, the daughter of Lycurgus, fairer to see than the flower in the bright sunshine. Scarcely could Demophon make it to shore, weak and weary, and his company wasted by weariness and famine; he was nearly driven to his death. His wise men counseled him to seek help and aid from the queen, and to see what grace he might obtain, and to make a purchase of provisions in that land to keep him from woe and misfortune. For he was sick and nearly dead; scarcely could he speak or draw breath, and he lay near Rhodopeya to rest himself. When he could walk, he thought it would be best to seek aid at the court. 2440

Men knew him well, and did him honor; for at Athens he was duke and lord, as Theseus his father had been, who in his day was of great renown--no man so great in that entire region. And he was like his father in face and form, and false in love; it came to him by nature. Like Reynard the fox, the fox’s son by nature knows his old father’s ways without teaching, as a drake can swim when it is caught and carried to the water’s edge. This honorable Phyllis, well pleased with his bearing and demeanor, treated him in a friendly manner. But because I am already oversupplied with writing about men false in love, and so that I may also hasten myself in my legend (may God grant me grace to finish it), therefore I pass on quickly this way. You have fully heard the scheme of Theseus in betraying fair Ariadne, who in pity had preserved him from death. In a few words, in exactly the same way Demophon trod the same path of his false father Theseus. For he swore to Phyllis to wed her, and pledged her his word, and picked from her all the goods he could, when he was whole and sound and had rested himself, and he did with Phyllis as he wished. And well could I, if I wished, describe all his doings back and forth. 2471

He said he must sail to his own country, for there he desired to prepare for her wedding, as fitted her honor and his also. And openly then he took his leave, and swore to her that he would not delay, but in a month would return. And in that land he ordered matters as if he were a true lord, and received men’s obedience well and familiarly, and ordered his ships to be made ready,
and went home as soon as he could. And he did not come again to Phyllis. So cruelly and sorely she suffered for that--alas as the stories remind us--that she caused her own death directly with a cord, when she saw that Demophon had betrayed her. 2486

But first she wrote to him and earnestly begged him to come and deliver her from her pains, as I shall retell in a word or two. I will not stoop to toil over him, or spend a penful of ink on him, for he was false in love, just as his father. May the Devil burn up both their souls! But I will write a word or two from the letter of Phyllis, though it may be but a small part. 2495

“O Demophon,” she said, “your hostess of Rhodopeya, your Phyllis, so encompassed with woe, must complain upon you, that you are not keeping the covenant that you made, but are delaying over the length of time set between us. Your anchor which you did drop in our haven gave promise that you would truly come again before the moon once completed her circuit; but the moon has hid her face four times since that day you left from this land, and four times she has lighted the world again. But for all that, in very truth, the Thracian waves have not yet brought the ship from Athens; and still it does not come. And if you would only calculate the appointed time, as I or other true lovers should, you would see I am not making my complaint, God knows, before the day.” 2512

But I cannot write all her letter, point by point, for it would be a burden to me; her letter was very long and broad. But here and there I have set it in rhyme, where it seems to me she has spoken well. 2517

She said, “Your sails do not return, nor truly is there any good faith in your words. But I know why you are not coming; it is because I was so generous in my love to you. And if the vengeance of the gods to whom you are forsown should fall on you for that, you are not sufficient to bear the penalty. Too much I trusted, well may I complain, in your lineage and your fair tongue, and in your tears that were falsely wrung out. How could you weep thus by deceitfulness?” she said. “Can such tears be feigned?” 2527

“Now surely, if you would only remember it, this ought to be but small glory to you, to have betrayed thus a simple maiden! I pray to God, and often have prayed, that this may be the greatest praise of all and the highest honor that ever shall come to you! And when your ancestors of old shall be depicted, so that men may see their worthiness, then I pray to God that you also may be depicted, so that people may read as they pass by, “Lo, this is he who betrayed with his flattery and basely wronged her who was his true love in thought and deed.” And truly, one point more may they see, that in this you are like your father; for he deceived Ariadne, in truth, with such treachery and duplicity as you have in beguiling me. And in that point, and not a worthy one, you follow him and are his heir in very truth. But since you have beguiled me so sinfully, though you are harder than any stone, within a while, you may see my body floating in the very harbor of Athens without burial place and burial.” 2554

And when this letter was sent forth, and she knew how fickle and false he was, soon in despair she destroyed herself, alas! Such sorrow she had, because she had so used herself up. Beware of your subtle foe, you women, since even this day examples may be seen; and trust, as in love, no man but me! 2561

Explicit Legenda Phillis. 56

IX. The Legend of Hypermnestra

Incipit Legenda Ypermystre. 57

In Greece there once were two brothers, of whom one was named Danaus, and had many sons from his body, as such false lovers often know how to do. Among all his sons there was one he loved best of all; and when this child was born, this Danaus crafted him a name and called him Lynceus. The second brother was named Aegyptus, and in love he was false as ever he pleased, and in his days he begat many daughters, among whom he begot by his own wife a dear daughter, the youngest of them all, and let her be named Hypermnestra. This child by her horoscope was born to all good virtues, as it pleased the gods before her birth that she should be the wheat of the sheaf. 58

2579

The Fates, whom we call Destiny, ordained for her that she should be compassionate, steadfast, wise, and true as steel, as these women 59 well agreed. For though Venus gave her great beauty, she was so compounded by the influence of Jupiter that tenderness, and fidelity, and fear of disgrace, and preservation of the good name of her wifehood--these all seemed to her to yield happiness on earth. And at that time of year red Mars was so feeble that he was bereft of his power for

56 Explicit Legenda Phillis. Here Ends the Legend of Phyllis.
57 Incipit Legenda Ypermystre. Here Begins the Legend of Hypermnestra.
58 Wheat of the sheaf:. She would be the best part of the entire stalk of wheat, i.e., of all his children.
59 Women. I.e., the Fates.
malice; Venus repressed his cruel activity. What with her power and other oppression by celestial houses, Mars’ venom was kept down, so that Hypermnestra dared not handle a knife with evil intent, even if it were to save herself. But as the heavens then revolved, she came under the evil aspects of Saturn, which made her to die in prison, as I shall afterwards tell. 2599

To Danaus and to Aegyptus as well, though they were two brothers, it seemed good to make a marriage between Hypermnestra and Lynceus (for at that time consanguinity was no hindrance to marriage), and appointed it should be on such a day, and the full agreement was made. The preparation was completed, and the time was near at hand. And thus Lynceus wedded the daughter of his uncle, and each had the other. The torches and the bright lamps burned, the sacrifices were fully prepared, the incense emanated sweetly from the fire; flower and leaf were torn up by the roots to make garlands and high crowns. The place was full of the sound of minstrelsy, of the amorous songs of marriage, as was he custom at that time. And this was in the palace of Aegyptus, who ruled in his house as he wished. And thus they wore the day to an end, and friends took their leave and went home. 2621

The night had come, and the bride had to go to bed. Aegyptus hastened to his chamber and secretly summoned his daughter. When the house was emptied of all people, he looked on his daughter with a joyful expression, and spoke to her as you shall hear. “My own true daughter, my heart’s treasure, since the day when my first shirt was made, or I received my lot at the hands of the Sisters of Fate, never has a thing came so near my heart as you, my Hypermnestra, beloved daughter! Take heed what I your father say here to you, and always follow the will of one who is wiser than you. For, first of all, daughter, I love you so that unless you do as I shall tell, you shall die, by Him who created all! In a few words, you will not escape from my palace before you die, unless you consent and work according to my counsel. Take this as my full resolution.” 2646

Hypermnestra cast down her eyes and trembled like the leaf of the green aspen; her hue grew deathly and like ashes, and she said, “Lord and father, God knows I will do all your will, according to my power, so it may be no dishonor to me.” 2652

“I will not,” he said, “have any exception.” And he brought forth a knife, sharp as a razor. “Hide this,” he said, “so that it may not be seen. And when your husband has gone to bed, cut his throat in two while he sleeps. For in my dreams I am warned that my nephew shall be my slayer, but which nephew I know not; therefore I wish to be safe. If you say no, by Him that I have sworn, we two shall have a quarrel, as I have said.” 2662

Hypermnestra nearly lost her wits, and, to pass from there unharmed, she consented to him; there was no other way to behave graciously. And with that he took up a flask, and said, “Give him a glass of this, or two or three, to drink when he goes to rest, and he shall sleep as long as ever you would like him to sleep, as the narcotics and opiates are so strong. And go on your way, lest he grow impatient.” 2671

Out came the bride; and with a grave countenance, as is often the manner with maidens, was brought to the chamber with revel and song. And in brief, lest this tale be too long, this Lynceus and she were soon brought to bed, and every person hastened out the door. 2677

The night wore on and he fell into slumber. She began to weep full tenderly, and arose, and quaked with fear, like a branch that Zephyrus’60buffets; and all in that city of Argos was hushed. Now she grew cold as frost; for pity so constrained her heart and fear of death so pained her that three times she fell down in distress. She arose and staggered here and there, and looked hard at her hands. 2688

“Alas! And shall my hands be bloody? I am a maiden, and, by my nature and my appearance and my clothes, my hands are not shaped for a knife, to tear any man from his life. What the Devil do I have to do with this knife? And shall I have my throat cut in two? Then I shall bleed, alas, and perish; and this thing must necessarily have an end, either he or I must die. Now surely,” she said, “since I am his wife, and he has my vow, it is better for me to die with wifely honor than to be a traitor living in shame. Be as it may, for earnest or game, he shall awake and arise, and go on his way by this gutter, before it is light.” 2705

And she wept tenderly on his face, and embraced him in her arms, and shook him, and gently awoke him. And when she had warned him and provided his escape, he leaped out at the window from the upper room. This Lynceus was swift and light of foot, and ran swiftly before his wife. 2712

This hapless woman, alas, was so weak and helpless that before she had gone far, her cruel father had her
seized. Alas, Lynceus, why so unkind? Why did you not remember to take her and lead her forth with you? For when she saw that he was gone, and that she could not go so fast or follow him, she sat herself down at that moment, until she was caught and fettered in prison. 2722

This tale is told for this end\textsuperscript{61} -- 2723

[Unfinished.]

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\footnote{This end. Chaucer is nearly finished with this tale. There is much speculation as to why he ends this tale, and the work as a whole, at this point.}