

The Letter of Cupid

Cupid, the lord to whose commands are bent 1
 The gentle company of gods on high,
 To whom those bound in hell are obedient,
 Whom mortal folk all serve assiduously,
 Cithera's child, the goddess's son truly: 5
 To all those subjects of our power we
 Send greetings, from our royal deity.

In general we will it to be known
 That ladies to whom all give reverence,
 And other gentlewomen too, have sown 10
 Such seed of complaint in our audience,
 Of men who do them outrage and offence,
 It grieves our ears to hear this sad lament,
 So piteous is the matter they present.

More than the other lands, about this isle 15
 Called Albion these women most complain.
 They say that there's the height and depth of guile, *shy or cunning*
 There men know how to fabricate and feign: *intelligence*
 With standing tears which from both eyes drop rain *pretend to be affected*
 (When really their hearts don't feel distress) 20
 To blind all women with their doubleness.

Men's words are spoken mournfully and slow,
 And with such pitiable countenance,
 Each upright person who observes them so
 Judges that in their hearts lies real grievance. 25
 So insupportable is their penance,
 (They say), unless their lady change their lot
 Immediately, they'll die upon the spot.

"Ah lady mine," they say, "you may be sure
 If you'll show mercy I will ever be, 30
 As long as life may flourish and endure,
 To you as meek and low in each degree
 As possible, and act with secrecy,

Just as, you know, you'd rather that I do,
And if I don't, may my heart break in two."

179
35

How hard it is to know a man's true heart!
The outward surface hides the truth from sight.
When every word which from man's lips may start
Is thought sincere, his conversation might
Seem unexceptionable, artless, and right.
O faithful woman, innocent and true,
Smooth-seeming falseness works its tricks on you.

40

Then bit by bit, moved by benevolence,
Thinking that all things are as these men say,
Women grant grace through pity and good sense,
Lest men, in love's absence, should pine away,
And cheerfully they enter on the way
Of blissful love – a way that's hard to keep to,
Thus are most women won, and made to weep, too.

45

*pine: suffer a mental
and physical decline.*

Then when this man the pot has by the handle,
When she's made his, without another's trace
He thinks the game's no longer worth the candle:
He deals with her no more if, in her place,
Another surfaces on whom his base
Affection he confers. O may he grieve!
Despite his oaths, a man's hard to believe.

50

55

Since every false man has some special friend, –
That kind of mate all men are glad to know –
As soon as his affair's come to an end
He quickly hastens to his good fellow –
The place, in fact, he just can't wait to go.
It's not enough for him to've had his fun,
He also must recount how it was done.

60

Does boasting thus seem right? Is this honor?
Should man reveal himself thus to ill-fame?
Can it be good to call himself a traitor
Expose a woman to a slanderous name,
And tell how on her body he's brought shame?
No worship will he on himself confer:
Severe reproof instead for him and her.

65

70

reproof: expression of blame or disapproval

Reproof for her? no, she should not feel grief,
All that she did was pityingly meant.
But he who planned and plotted this mischief,
Who spoke so fair yet was to falsehood bent,
His be the grief and shame, by Reason sent, 75
And hers should be the thanks perpetual,
Who in a time of need could help so well.

Although these men, through sleight and subtlety,
A foolish, simple, innocent woman
Betray, why it's no wonder since the city 80
Of ancient Troy – the famous tale began –
Betrayed was through the deceit of man,
And set afire; the city's overthrow
And ultimate destruction we all know.

Don't men betray both countries great and kings? 85
Who is it that can shape a remedy
Against contrived arrangements, hidden things?
Who has the craft such stratagems to see
But man, whose will is ready, ceaselessly
Devising falsehoods, busy night and day. 90
Women, beware of men's cunning, I say.

And further, what these men will want to do
Where it appears unlikely they'll succeed
Is to get creatures like themselves, untrue,
And importune them to pursue their need. 95
One begs another in this cause to speed
And largely he rewards his friend's travail.
Women don't understand how men prevail! *prove more powerful
or superior.*

Another wretch says to his hapless friend
"Good hunting! for the woman who's inspired 100
Your love does not to faithfulness pretend.
For a long trip, by men she's so desired –
And, like a horse, from day to day is hired –
That when you leave the woman you've embraced
Another comes; you're rapidly replaced. 105

Now spur on fast and ride along your way
While you are with her. She behind your back

Is liberal; she can no man gainsay,
But quickly from each one will take a snack,
For thus these women act now, all the pack. 110
Whoever trusts them, hanged may he be,
They always look for change and novelty."

Whence do these speeches spring, but from envy?
Since he himself can't win – no, can't get at – her,
He speaks reproach of her and villainy, 115
Just thus men's blabbing tongue is wont to chatter.
Thus sundry men will often try to batter
Others' defences down, in sundry wise,
Because they can't achieve their longed-for prize.

Many a man would not, for his own good 120
(Who has in love his time misspent, abused,)
Let it be known his plea had been withstood
And that he was by his lady refused,
Or that in vain was everything he'd mused.
Wherefore he knows no better medicine 125
Than lies about his lady to begin.

"All women are," he says, "easy to get,
Not one can say no if she is well wooed.
If any man takes time with her, his set
Intention will not fail unless it's crude, 130
Unless he's sunk in such a foolish mood
That he spoils all with impropriety.
Women don't like *that*, it seems to me."

To slander women thus cannot be right. slander: make false
The courtier who to courtesy aspires and damaging statements 135
Must in defence of women take delight,
Just as the order of gentleness requires.
If anyone the virtuous life admires
He must flee what's to gentleness contrary:
A slandering tongue is his great adversary. 140

A foul vice is it to be light of tongue.
Whoever chatters freely, babbles oft.
The tongue of man so swift is and so strong
That when it is erected high aloft

It follows Reason slowly, and so soft,
The tongue, it seems, can't overtake again.
Lord! in a pinch you can count on these men!

145

If sometimes men have found one woman bad,
Inconstant, negligent, and changeable,
Arrogant, haughty, one whose malice had
Stripped her of love, made unreliable,
Sly, cunning, false, her actions culpable,
Wicked and violent, full of cruelty,
It can't be said that such all women be.

detailed description
of bad woman,
150
seems like he wants
it to stand out.

When the high god the angels had created,
Were there not found some, among all the rout,
Of whom malice and pride must be related?
Yes, everyone knows that, without a doubt,
A multitude of spirits were cast out.
Shall all the angels thus be labelled proud?
Such a contention cannot be allowed.

155

160

Of twelve apostles one a traitor was,
The remnant of them faithful were and true.
Then if it happen that one woman does
Behave falsely, men must that one eschew,
Not then conclude all women are untrue.
In my view it's men's own unfaithfulness
That causes them to trust in women less.

165

O every man should have a tender heart
Toward woman; he should judge her honorably.
However we assess his outward part,
Whether he's bad or acts judiciously,
Every man knows, whose mind works reasonably,
That he is from a woman's womb descended,
Thus it's his shame when she is not defended.

170

175

Good fruit from wicked trees can never come,
For as the fruit is, so indeed's the tree.
Think of the body that your own came from.
Your mother is the mirror in which you see.
Honor her, if you would honored be.

180

Despise her not, respect her, hold her dear,
Lest by your fault, your wickedness appear.

An ancient English proverb tells us this,
"Men say that bird or fowl is dishonest,
Whatever kind it is, and thought churlish
Whose practice is to dirty its own nest."
Men! to speak well of womankind is best,
And never to disparage or condemn:
Their reputation means so much to them.

185

Ladies likewise complain about the clerks,
That scholars have made books in which they claim
To criticize and slur all women's works,
Saying that they deserve reproach and blame,
And causelessly give them a wicked name.
Thus women are abused on every side,
And lied about, and slandered far and wide.

190

195

These wicked books then list what they have done,
How women have betrayed, to name a few,
Adam and David, Sampson, Solomon,
And many another more. Who can rehearse anew
The treason that they've done, and still will do?
Who may their female malice comprehend?
Certainly not the world. Clerks say it has no end.

200

It seems as if
he thinks women are
as they are portrayed.

Ovid, in his book called *Remedy
Of Love*, reproach and shame of women writes.
In this, it seems to me, he wrote folly,
As does each man who in such stuff delights.
A scholar's custom is, when he endites
Work about women – prose or rhyme or verse –
To say they're bad, though he knows the reverse.

205

210

Most clerks at school in Ovid's book have read:
It cautions them when grown to shun love's game,
And when it comes to love, to live in dread,
Since to deceive is women's entire aim.
They say it's best if one can perils frame –
Can calculate where danger's jaws will snap,
For many a man fell in a woman's trap.

215

It makes no difference what the clerks maintain,
For all their wrongful writings we don't care.
All their concern and labor is in vain.
Together Nature and I, my lady fair,
Won't let it happen, while the world may wear,
That clerks by their outrageous tyranny
Should exercise on women mastery.

220

At one time many clerks were in our chain
Bound up, who now, because desire is less
And distaste more, may not to love attain,
And say, in age, that love is foolishness.
Because they lack both courage and success
They stir up others, by their wicked saws,
To mutiny against us and our laws.

225

wife of both
prologue

In spite of those who slander women most,
Such is the frightful force which we command
That suddenly we can strike down their boast,
Immediately their fantasies are banned.
The choice of loves shall not lie in their hand,
The foulest slut in town they shan't refuse
If we wish it, whatever plan they muse;

235

] a bit violent
even if he is
trying to defend women

But in their hearts they'll burningly desire
To have her, like a duchess or a queen.
So can we all men's hearts kindle to fire
And, as we please, send joy and sorrow keen.
Those who toward women cruel and harsh have been
Shall feel and know how sharply we can smite,
And how our strokes fall, how they carve and bite.

240

245

For even this great clerk, subtle Ovid,
And many another man, had to endure
Woman's deceit. We know that no men did
Bear more than scholars had to. What pleasure!
So excellent a doctor could not cure
Himself: and others more, who could well preach,
They too were trapped, whatever they might teach.

He acknowledges
women as
deceitful

250

You may be certain that each stratagem
By women was perceived as it was meant.

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Himself: and others more, who could well preach,
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By women was perceived as it was meant.

They realized how cunningly such men 255
Attacked them, on what plots their hearts were bent,
And thus these clerks were caught, in the event.
With one venom another was destroyed,
And thus these scholars often were annoyed.

These were not gentlewomen, nonetheless, 260
Who practiced such deceptions in this wise;
But thus vile women who were virtueless
Compensated ancient scholars wise.
Therefore scholars mustn't criticize
Feminine behavior generally: 265
Credit can't be acquired dishonorably.

If those men who to be lovers pretend
Behaved more faithfully and did not lie,
And dreaded to deceive or to offend,
Then women might not choose to pass them by. 270
But each man's heart's a fickle butterfly *fickle: changing*
Which can alight on one just a short while. *beginning*
Can it be wrong in this case to beguile? *charm or enchant*

One accusation men have right at hand:
That women lightly, without any pain 275
Are captured, and they can no man withstand
Who chooses his discomfort to explain.
They are so frail; they can't themselves restrain;
Whoever likes may easily possess
Those hearts which are so easy to impress. 280

For master John de Meun, as I suppose,
It was a foolish occupation then,
His making of the *Romance of the Rose*:
So many a sly insinuation; men
And situations to twist round his pen, 285
So long a process, so many a clever wile
Offered, a foolish damsel to beguile!

We cannot see, nor our wit comprehend
That art and pain and subtlety may fail
To conquer there, and soon to make an end 290
When man a feeble fortress shall assail.

Soon too on that battalion he'll prevail
 Whose members offer only sad silence,
 Where no one has the heart to make defense.

Then must it follow of necessity 295
 Since art requires such stratagems and pain
 To trick a woman, whosoever she be,
 That constancy *does* in their hearts remain,
 Unlike what several subtle scholars feign.
 Rather they are what women ought to be: } ? 300
 Serious, constant, brimming with pity. }

To Jason, what a friend Medea was
 In the procuring of the fleece of gold;
 How falsely he repaid her tenderness
 Whose help permitted him the fleece to hold. 305
 How may this man (shame on him) be so bold
 To lie and cheat her, who from death and shame
 Kept him, and got him everlasting fame?

Think of the Trojan traitor Aeneas,
 The faithless man, how he himself foreswore
 To Dido, who the queen of Carthage was,
 Who rescued him from all his suffering sore.
 What gentleness might she have done him more
 Than she with unfeigned purpose to him did?
 And then what mischief in his heart was hid! 315

no mention of
 310
 Dido's death

In our *Legend of Martyrs* can be found
 (By anyone who may this book have read)
 That men will not by oath or pledge be bound,
 Of condemnation strong they have no dread;
 In heart of man all faithfulness is dead. 320
 The soil is parched; there may no truth be grown,
 To women specially is their vice well known.

"Legend of good
 women"

"There is no malice," so these clerks maintain,
 "Like to a woman's crooked wickedness."
 O woman! How will you yourself sustain 325
 Since men against you so much harm witness?
 A straw for them! Chin up! Avoid sadness!

Guard what's your own, however fierce men be,
And some of them will smart, I guarantee!

What can there be, in woman's spite, to fear? 330
They slay no people, level no cities,
They don't oppress others, nor domineer,
Betray empires, or realms, or rich duchies,
Nor strip from men their lands or properties,
Poison their friends, houses reduce to ash, 335
Nor fraudulent bonds make, simply for cash.

Trust, perfect love, consummate charity,
Fervent intention, and a heart inclined
To virtue, as it seems, most suitably –
These are the qualities of womankind 340
And women can restore man's angry mind
With soft and soothing words, discreet, benign,
Their inward state revealed by outward sign.

The female heart does not to cruelty
Incline itself; instead they're generous, 345
Compassionate, full of humility,
Modest, submissive, shy and courteous,
Timid and cautious and in speech judicious.
The woman who has not these qualities
Cannot the promptings of her nature please. 350

Men say that our first mother, nonetheless,
Made all mankind to lose their liberty,
And naked stripped us all of happiness
When God's express command she flouted; she
Presumed to taste and eat of that same tree 355
Which God forbade. This act she should not have
Done; had the fiend not been, she would not have.

*fiend: evil spirit
or demon*

The envious swelling that the fiend, our foe,
Felt in his heart because of mankind's wealth,
Dispatched a serpent, sent her forth to go 360
To mislead Eve, and thus was all man's wealth
Snatched from him by the fiend, by guile and stealth,
The woman unwitting how the trick was wrought,
God knows it was the farthest from her thought!

Therefore we say that this good woman Eve
Our father Adam then deceived nought.
Her act was not intended to deceive
It seems, unless the woman, in her thought
Had planned it out, before it first was wrought.
The act, however, doesn't these terms meet,
And hence it can't justly be called deceit.

365

It seems as if
he is not fully
convinced
370

No one deceives without intending it,] this cancels Eve's
The fiend, not Eve, had plotted all this ill. unintended deceit.
Then it is wrong to judge, or think it fit
To censure her. Eve's guilt in this is nil.
Reprove the fiend: let his be the ill-will.
We must excuse her simple innocence,
Save only that she broke obedience.] she is to blame.

375

How few the men are (while we're on this theme) –
Hardly a one, we dare with safety say –
From day to day, as plainly may be seen,
Who don't God's precepts often disobey.
Keep this in mind won't you, good sirs, we pray,
Whenever you are wise and sensible
You'll then hold her the more excusable. ?

380

385

And when men say, "In man is steadfastness,
And woman's heart's essentially unstable,"
Who may of Adam bear such staunch witness?
Tell me this now, was he not changeable?
Our parents both together met with trouble,
Except that willingly the fiend tricked Eve –
She did not so to Adam, by your leave.

390

Yet that sin was a glad one for mankind,
The fiend was tricked, in spite of all his sleight,
For all he could man in his traps enwind.
In order to make man's sin-burden light
God freely came down from his heavenly height,
And flesh and blood he took of a virgin,
And suffered death to free mankind from sin.

395

And God, from whom nothing may hidden be,
If he in women knew such sinfulness

400

As men attribute to them generally,
Of our lady, whose bounty is to bless,
He'd never have been born; but from distress
And vice he knew her free, with virtue filled,
Hence of her cleanness to be born he willed.

405

Accumulated virtue has such force
That all too weak is human faculty
To set it out, and therefore our recourse
Instead of praising her must simply be
To pause. One thing we're certain of, that she
Unworthy man continually befriends,
The key of mercy from her waist depends.

? Confusing intention

410

And everyone of mercy has such need
That lacking it, farewell the joy of man.
Remember well this virgin's power – indeed
Mercy she may obtain, she will, she can.
Displease her not, respect both that woman
And other women also, for her sake,
Unless you do, your sorrow shall awake.

415

Respect women
for fear of
punishment not
because they are
virtuous like Mary

420

O precious gem, o martyr Margaret,
Fear no more your holy blood's effusion,
Your martyrdom we cannot now forget,
O constant woman, in your martyr's passion,
You overcame the crafty fiend's temptation.
Your virtuous example, unafraid,
Turned many to the faith of God, pure maid.

425

But understand that we commend her not
So much because of chaste virginity,
Be sure that that was never in our thought,
For ever we wage war on chastity,
And ever shall. Instead know this truly,
It is her loving, constant heart that we
May not drive out of our memory.

certain reproach
for chastity, not

430

found in Christ's love

Where can you find in any sort of book
That speaks of Jesus's works, his death and life,
A passage that relates that women took
No care of him, left him in woe or strife?

chooses to use
the negative to
praise instead
of the positive

435

Where was there found a single man, alive
To him as women were? No, there were none. 440
The apostles forsook Jesus, every one. *for sake: abandon*

Women forsook him not: but then the seals
Of faith were kept by one woman alone.
This is the truth that holy writ reveals:
Look and you'll see what scripture here makes known. 445
And therefore it can patently be shown;
In women's bosoms all the constance reigns,
Men's hearts contain all variance and change.

Believe this firmly, steadfastly, and be
Convinced that this disinterested praise
Of women is not said for flattery
Nor to inflate their minds with prideful phrase
But only so it may their spirits raise,
Encouraging women to persevere
In virtue, and to live in honor clear.

*Christine says
450
this of men.*

The more the virtue is, the less the pride.
Virtue is so entirely worthy in kind,
That vice and she may not together abide.
She exiles vice completely from the mind.
She flees from him, she leaves him far behind. 460
O woman who to virtue are hostess,
Great is your honor and your worthiness.

Then thus will we conclude. We'll say, in sum:
We order each and every minister
Who's poised at our regal command to come, 465
To punish straight these traitors sinister,
With speed and dispatch to apply this cure:
Expel them from our court, completely spurn
These creatures so that they may not return.

Thus let it be, without the least delay;

470

203

Let there be no excuse or exculpation.

Written in the air, the lusty month of May,

Within our battlements where many a million

Of lovers true have found their habitation.

The year of grace so joyful and jocund,

475

A thousand and four hundred and second. 1402

Thus ends the letter of Cupid.

TEXTUAL NOTES

The Letter of Cupid

Title and colophon are enclosed in double dots (gemipunctus).

- 56. MS *ooth //*
- 63. MS catchwords *Is this a fair*
- 104. *conpaigntie*: The nasal sign is expanded *n* since Hoccleve consistently spells *conpleynte*, *compassid*, *conprehende*.
- 144. MS *wan*
- 215. Above the line is written *sc[ilicet] libri*: that is books are the 'they' who speak, not scholars (211).
- 399. MS catchwords *And god fro whom*
- 434. MS *of* — *remembrance*. I have supplied *our* to make the line decasyllabic.
- 442. The last folio on which the poem appears (f. 50) and that following (f. 51) are trimmed just below the final line of text, thus lack about two and a half inches at bottom margin.
- 476. MS scribal abbreviations above numerals, deleted

NOTES

The Letter of Cupid

(Line numbers refer to the Middle English text.)

- 7. The first occurrence of the royal *we* in the poem. Hoccleve's scribal practice regarding the *w* graph, when Cupid speaks of *we*, is not consistent: majuscule appears ten times (ll. 234, 241, 288, 365, 380, 383, 411, 423, 428, 431), minuscule six times (7, 8, 219, 434, 463, 464), which suggests that Hoccleve doesn't feel strongly about the matter. In three lines Hoccleve apparently slips and uses the singular *I* in Cupid's speeches (91, 167, 206). The last of these slips occurs because Hoccleve is translating directly from Christine: "dont je tiens qu'il meffist" (282); "Where in I trowe/he hide greet folie" (206).
- 8. The capitulum mark which is placed in the margin nine times first occurs here. It is used to signal a new division or heading in the text, or sometimes a change of speaker. It occurs at l. 8, after the document's original title, address, and greeting, at the point where Cupid first speaks. The marks at ll. 99 and 113 indicate first, the false lover's words and second, the resumption of Cupid's voice. The capitulum mark at l. 190 points the accusation women make against men; at l. 218 Cupid gives judgment regarding the accusation; and at l. 274 we hear men's summation, and his final injunctions, while the very last capitulum mark at l. 472 calls attention to the dating clause necessary for official documents (Bentley xxii).
- 12. *doon hem outrage and offense* = affront or attack them.
- 17. *cropppe and roote*. This expression, meaning "everything," "the whole," appears twice in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (hereafter *TC*): 2.348, 5.1245. All quotations from Chaucer are taken from F. N. Robinson, *Works*, 2nd ed., Boston, 1957.
- 28. *in the place* = on that spot, right there. Since Chaucer's Sir Thopas, that conventional minstrel, rhymes of "Popering, in the place" (1910) perhaps Hoccleve too is parodying a certain sort of tired romance vocabulary.
- 35, 38. The same two verbs, *brëste* and *sterie*, are juxtaposed in the passage from Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* (hereafter *LGW*) where Aeneas is demonstrating to Dido, in Hoccleve's words, how "hard is it to knowe a mannes herte":

"My destine is sone for to sayle;
For which, me thynketh, brosten is myn herte!"
Therwith his false teres out they sterie. (F 1299-1301)

36-42. The inward-outward contrast which Stephen Medcalf sees in much of Hoccleve's verse (123-40) is present in this stanza, and in line 343.

38-40. These lines may be glossed "when it appears to any person that everything he (the false speaker) says is heartfelt, and should please." In using *qweme* ("please"), Hoccleve may have in mind Criseyde's similar reflections on the difficulty, in love, of both being and seeming to be virtuous:

How bisy, if I love, ek most I be
To plesen hem that jangle of love, and dremen,
And cove hem, that they seye noon harme of me!
For though ther be no cause, yet hem semen
Al be for harm that folk hire frendes quemen;
And who may stoppen every wikkid tonge,
Or sown of belles whil that thei ben ronge? (2.799-805)

41. Cf. *LGW* F 1254: "O sely wemen, ful of innocence."

43-48. Cf. Usk, *Testament* II.iii 36-39 "And whan these sely women, for freete of their kynde, beleven your wordes [men's], and wenen al be gospel the promise of your behestes, then graunt they to you their hertes..." Cf. *Epistre*, II. 99-103.

50. Although this phrase has a proverbial ring, Whiting lists only Hoccleve's lines.

61. *on a lowe*. Since *lowe* = flame, this expression means "on fire." Hoccleve uses it again in a literal rather than a metaphorical sense in *Learn to Die* (703).

64-65. Usk too uses a short rhetorical question: "How often have men changed her loves in a litel whyle...is this fair?" *Testament* II.iii, 61-65.

65. The probable meaning for *accuse* is "disclose," since line 63 has emphasized the wrongness of revealing his deceit. The legal meaning, "to charge with a crime," may be present also, in view of the following *confesse* (66).

71-77. Chaucer likewise implies that women's pity might sometimes be thought excessive, and he likewise points to the difficulty of judging it correctly. He implies, in addition, that if he is unwilling to call innocence folly, others – perhaps like Hoccleve – will not be so judicious.

Yet Pitee, thurgh his stronge gentil myght
Forgaf, and made Mercy passen Ryght,
Thurgh innocence and ruled Curtesye.
But I ne clepe nat innocence folye,
Ne fals pitee, for vertu is the mene. (*LGW* F 161-65)

73-75. Cf. Usk "Of whiche slaunders and tenes ye false men and wicked ben the veray causes; on you by right ought these shames and these reproves al hoonly discende" *Testament* II.iii 81-83.

89-90. "Whose will is always ready to attach itself to things (or deeds?) which tend toward dishonesty."

100. *Thow fisshist faire*. Ironically, "you've done well." Pandarus uses this phrase when he attempts to convince Criseyde to love Troilus: "If that ye don us bothe dyen,/Thus giletes, than have ye fished fayre!" (*TC* 2.327-28).

102. *rode*. Thomas Austin, in Furnivall's edition, glossed this word "road," and Skeat "Road, common use," but Gollancz's "riding," i.e. a journey on horseback, is correct. *MED* (n.3) cites Gower's *Confessio Amantis* c. 1393 "Riht so this knyht on daies brode In clos him field and schop his rode On nyhtes time" (l. 1730).

105. *blerid is thyn ye*: "You are deceived," though not necessarily in a sexual way; the Miller in Chaucer's *Reeve's Tale*, in thinking about Alan and John, resolves "yet shal I blere hir ye" (4049).

106. *Now prike on faste*. The central meaning of *prike*, "spur, ride fast," is probably reinforced by sexual undertones through its sense of "arouse, incite," as in Prologue to *CT*, 11, though this meaning does not appear unambiguously in Chaucer. See Judith H. Anderson, "A Gentle Knight was Pricking on the Plaine": The Chaucerian Connection," *English Literary Renaissance* 15 (1985), 166-74.

ryde thy iourneye. Hoccleve is punning on *ryde*'s well-known double meaning, "to travel" and "to copulate." The latter sense is explicit in Chaucicleer's reassurance to Pertelote that she is his joy and bliss, "Al be it that I may nat on yow ryde" (*NPT* 4358). Almost 200 years later, George Puttenham notes that the corresponding verb in French has sexual overtones, and this pair of meanings, French and English, may have been in Hoccleve's mind, though this passage is original; Christine does not use the riding metaphor. "To which the Ambassador answered vnwares and not knowing the French terme 'Par ma foy elle cheuauche fort bien, & si en prend grand plaisir.' She rides (saith he) very well, and takes great pleasure in it. There was good smiling one vpon another of the Ladies and Lords, the Ambassador wist not whereat, but laughed himselfe for companie. This word *Chevaucher* in the French tongue hath a reprobate sence, specially being spoken of a woman's riding." (*The Arte of English Poesie*, [1589], 1936, p. 272).

109. *take a snak*. *OED* lists Hoccleve's line as an example of the meaning "a bite," since the first instance of *snak* meaning a share or portion comes in 1683, but says "In quot. 1402 *fig.* with approximation to sense 3" [i.e. "portion"], and indeed the sexual sense of the line seems to demand this meaning.

110. *Al the pak* is probably not dismissive: the *Pearl* poet describes the company of the saved as "so cumly a pakke of joly juele" (929), and Chaucer speaks of the virtue or purity of pagan women, "And yit they were hethene, al the pak" (*LGW* G 299).

142. *gabbith*. Probably "speaks foolishly" fits the sense of this quasi-proverb better than "lies" or even Gollancz's "boasts" (from *OF gaber*). For a similar sentiment from *Regement* 88.2439-43 see Whiting T393.

143-46. *areisid vp* and *softe* suggest that in this passage both tongue and penis find it difficult to overtake Reason.

147. A piece of general sarcasm: in a pinch, or when tried, these men can't be trusted.

148. *Nyce* carries a range of meanings, including "fussy," "sluggish," "dissipated," and simply "foolish."

153. *wikkid*: Perhaps here "cruel" rather than "unfavorable" (194) or "bad" (197).

156. *Whethir* indicates a question is to follow.

162-63. Furnivall pointed out that Christine's poem doesn't contain the statement that the company of apostles itself included one traitor, and Pryor suggests (42) that Hoccleve might have gleaned this observation from the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* (1001-05).

171. The fatuity of this line is remarkable unless a second, sexual, meaning for *shap* is admitted, as in the Parson's remarks on too-tight male garments: "Allas! some of hem shewen the boce of hir shap" (the boss, or swelling, of their genitals, 423). Hoccleve would then be saying that whether they are sexually successful or not, men should revere women.

176-77. Chaucer's "Legend of Phyllis" opens "By preve as wel as by autorite/ That wiked fruit cometh of a wiked tre" (*LGW* 2394-5). Cf. Matthew 7:17.

183. The proverb is indeed an old one: Whiting (B306) cites *The Owl and the Nightingale*, c. 1250. "Tharbi men segget a vorbisne: 'Dahet habbe that ilke best That fuleth his owe nest'" (10.98-100), and a lyric from c. 1390, contemporary with Hoccleve (Brown, *Lyrics XIV* 176, 73-74).

196. Skat gives the etymology of *belowen on*: "'lied against,' pp. of *bileō3en*, A.S. *biltogan*."

199. See *Epistre* note ll. 267-70.

209. In the phrase "ym or vers" Hoccleve is distinguishing rhythm or metre (see *MED rime*, n. 3b) from rhyme (vers).

215. *peril to caste*: is *auantage*. Hoccleve's *They seyn* suggests proverbial status for this cautionary expression ("Premeditation is rewarded"). Whiting (P146) cites, besides Hoccleve's lines, Lydgate's *Troy Book*, c. 1420, "Who cast no peril til that it be-falle/ Insteade of sugre ofte tasteth galle" (l. 120.3643-44).

Above the manuscript's *They* appears the gloss *sc[ilicet] libri*, indicating it is books, not clerks, who give this advice. Durham UL MS Cosin V.iii.9, ll. 543-4 is similarly annotated.

216. "Peril" should be understood after *switch*.

241-42. Cf. Scattergood, 81, for citations of passages on the God of Love's power from Froissart, Machaut, and *Le Roman de la Rose*. Gervase Mathew's contention that the *Boke of Cupide* influenced Hoccleve is perhaps based on these lines (30).

243. *They that to wommen been I whet so keene*. Those whom Love punishes are the men of l. 232, who "blamen wommen moost" and who similarly, in this line, are so sharply roused against them (*I whet so keene*).

244-45. Hoccleve may have in mind the following passage from *Parliament of Foules*, with its similar parallel verbs ("kerue and byte," "wounde and kerue").

Cupide, oure lord, his arwes forge and file;
And at his fet his bowe al redy lay;
And Wille, his doughter, temprede al this while
The hevedes in the welle, and with hire file
She touchede hem, after they shulde serve
Some for to sle, and some to wounde and kerve. (212-17)

249. *deyntee*. Either the explicitly sarcastic "pleasure" or the more ironic "honor" can fit here.

257. *And tho Clerkes! they in hir daunger hente*. Skat glosses: "They [women] in their power caught those clerks"; an alternative reading might be "They [women] attacked those clerks in their [male] disdain."

280. Pandarus says to Criseyde "And hard was it youre herte for to grave" (*TC* 2.1241).

285. Seymour notes (116) that this phrase is used in *TC* 2.659; *SummT* 2217; *PardT* 838, *Regement* 50.

290-92. The parallel occurrences of *soone* emphasize the futility of man's enterprise, undertaken against little or no opposition.

302. *Our legende of martirs* (316), that is Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*, treats the story of Jason and Medea in ll. 1580-1679. Chaucer says Medea "saved hym his lyf and his honour/ And gat hym a name ryght as a conquerour" (1648-49). Hoccleve writes that Medea "from deeth and shame/ Him kepte/ and gat him so greet prys and name" (307-08).

309. Cf. *LGW* 924 ff. for the story of Aeneas and Dido.

316. Brusendorff pointed out (141-48) that the poem's modern title, *The Legend of Good Women*, is not found in any manuscript and represents William Thynne's sixteenth-century editorial decision, based perhaps on MS Arch. Selden B.24's "Here endis the prolog of the legendis of good wommen," and the lines in which the narrator is commanded to spend his time "In makynge of a glorious legende/ Of goode wemen maydenys & wyues" (473-74, 485-86). He quotes an early fifteenth-century work addressed to Cupid, God of Love, in which the narrator says that he has read "ful often in my contemplatyf medytacions The holy legende of Martyrs of Cypydo" (145, n.1). Chaucer refers to the work twice: in the Man of Law's introduction where he calls it the "Seintes Legende of Cupide" (61) and in the *Retractation*, where, more casually, it appears as the "book of the xxv. Ladies."

327. *strah*. An exclamation of contempt. The Old Man in *Regement* utters the same sort of encouraging shout "Plukke vp þin herte" (161) to invigorate the drooping poet.

338-39. "A strong intention and a disposition toward good qualities, as is fitting."

341-42. Cf. Usk, *Testament of Love*, "They comne with their swetnesse the crewel herte ravishe, and make it meke, buxom, and benigne, without violence mevinge" (II.iii.21-23).

346. Chaucer calls Hypermetra "Fyetous, sad, wis, and trewe as stel/ As to these wemen it acordeth wel" (*LGW* 2582-83).

358. Chaucer's parson, defining the sins which spring from pride, says "Swellynge of herte is whan a man rejoyseth hym of harm that he hath doon" (*ParsT* 398).

359, 361. In this double use of *welthe*, the first appearance might be translated "happiness," the second "spiritual well-being."

360. The serpent, Satan's emissary, is female.

377. *for excusid*: as excused

389. Perhaps *tellith on* is simply equivalent to "tell," without any emphatic sense, though the four instances in Chaucer of this expression are all somewhat peremptory imperatives (*MILT* 3134, *CKT* 4345, *FKT* 702, *TC* 2.1195).

404-06. Parallel enjambments at the ends of 404 and 405, with the verb twice deferred until the beginning of the following line, emphasize the parallel praises of the Virgin: "since she of vice was void, and of virtue endowed." Alliterating vs link the lines.

409-10. *put in suspense*. A legalism: *OED* (sb.1) says of this expression: "to defer or intermit the execution, payment, etc. of... Chiefly Law."

411-12. Cf. Hoccleve's "De Beata Virgine," "In thee/ next god/ is al þat vs may saue," (103).

416. Impersonal construction: "Her power must be noted."

421. Determinedly virginal, St. Margaret was martyred when she refused the advances of the Roman prefect Olybrius (see Rev. Alban Butler, *Lives of the Saints* [New York, 1932], Vol. 7, 288-89; David Hugh Farmer, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* [Oxford, 1978], 260-61). Thus, as Cupid himself says, her celibacy makes her an odd devotion for the God of Love. At the same time her miraculous escape from a dragon's belly made her the advocate to whom pregnant women might pray for a safe delivery, and thus her cult is associated with fertility as well as virginity. In the *Letter* her religious constancy, however, allies her with the company of women constant in love and with Mary, faithful from Good Friday until Easter (see II. 442-43).

Hoccleve's stanza draws upon the opening passage of the *Legenda Aurea*'s version of St. Margaret's story. He might have used either the Latin version or the French one contained in, e.g. BL Royal 19.B.XVII, f. 167^v or Additional 16907,

f. 145, since Latin and French texts are virtually identical. He did not use the English version contained in MSS Harley 630 or Harley 4775.

Margarita dicitur a quadam pretiosa gemma, quae margarita vocatur... Sic beata Margareta habuit virtutem contra effusionem sui sanguinis per constantiam, quia in suo martirio constantissima exstitit, contra cordis passionem, id est, daemonis tentationem per victoriam, quia ipsa dyabolum superavit, ad spiritus confortationem per doctrinam, quia per suam doctrinam multorum animos confortavit et ad Christi fidem convertit (*Jacobi a Voragine Legenda Aurea*, ed. Th. Graesse [Dresden & Leipzig, 1846], 400).

In Caxton's translation:

Margaret is said of a precious gem, or ouche, that is named a margaret... the blessed Margaret had virtue against shedding of her blood by constancy, for in her martyrdom she was most constant, and also against the passion of the heart, that is to say, temptation of the devil. For she overcame the devil by victory, and to the confortation of the spirit by doctrine, for by her doctrine she comforted much people, and converted to the faith of Christ (*The Golden Legend*, ed. F.S. Ellis [London, 1900], 4.66).

Besides representing the pearl to which the *Legenda Aurea* alludes and which appears in Thomas Usk's *Testament of Love*, the marguerite is also the daisy which figures so centrally in the Prologue to *LGW*. In Chaucer's daisy-poem, which is indebted to the French marguerite poems of his peers Guillaume de Machaut, Jean Froissart, and Eustache Deschamps, the flower's central meaning, again, is constancy. (For background on the French marguerite poems and their relation to Chaucer see James I. Wimsatt, *The Marguerite Poetry of Guillaume de Machaut*, Chapel Hill [University of North Carolina Studies in Romance Languages and Literatures 87, 1970]; John L. Lowes, "The Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* as Related to the French *Marguerite* Poems and the *Filostrato*," *PMLA* 19 [1904], 593-683.)

426. "Your edifying example converted many." Butler says, "The next day an attempt was made to slay her in various ways both by fire and by water; but the only result was to convert thousands of the spectators, who were all put to the sword" (289).

442-43. From Good Friday to Easter the Virgin alone maintained faith in Christ.

444-45. Cf. *Regement* 337-38: "þat oure lord god seip in holy scripture/ May not be fals; þis knawit euery whigt."

454. Here *courage* admits both the meaning "disposition" and the modern "courage." Cf. Hoccleve's praise of the Virgin in "De Beata Virgine": "Thy kynde is nat for to be changeable,/ But in vertu to be constant and stable" (123-24).

456-60. Although these lines have a proverbial ring they are actually translated and expanded from *Epistre*, 765-67.

463. *conclude and deffyne*. Doublets: "sum up and state in conclusion."

GLOSSARY

The Letter of Cupid

The glossary contains obsolete words and those whose form makes them difficult to recognize. In the case of identical forms (*maugree* and *wight*) the first occurrence is listed first. The composite forms *their* ("the air") and *tescheewe* ("to avoid") have been listed under *t* for ease of access. Line reference is given only to the initial occurrence of a word. The vowel spelled *i* or *y* is treated as *i*. The vowel written as *u* or *v* (or *w*) is treated as modern *u* and the consonant written *u* or *v* as modern *v*.

- accuse *v.* reveal; charge with crime 65
- anoon *adv.* immediately 159
- anoyed *pp.* harmed, damaged 259
- auant *n.* boast 64
- auenture *n.* chance, per ~ 349
- ay *adv.* always 112
- bataille *n.* battalion 292
- belowen *pp.* lied about, reviled
- beren *v.* ~ on honde, accuse 274
- betidde *v.* happened 315
- blerid *pp.* dimmed 105, ~ is thyn
ye, you are tricked
- breewid *pp.* contrived 73
- breste *v.* break 35
- but *conj.* except 39; unless 131
- byheeste *n.* promise 318
- can *v.* understands 88
- caste *v.* imagine, foresee 215,
calculated 373
- castes *n.* contrivances 88
- cautele *n.* contrivance 286
- cely *adj.* innocent 79
- charge *n.* no ~, no matter 218
- cherfliss *adj.* boorish 185
- cheuyce *v.* sustain, provide for
- clappe *v.* chatter 328, clappith 142
- clept *pp.* called 16
- conceit(s) *n.* thought, idea 320,
364
- compassid *pp.* plotted, devised 369
- corage *n.* disposition 214
- coupable *adj.* culpable, to blame
152
- crabbid *adj.* bitter, shrewish 323
- crake *v.* boast; say, esp. loudly or
sharply 328
- croppe *n.* growing tip 17, ~ and
roote, entirety
- cure *n.* care; do no ~, care nothing
219
- daunger *n.* power 257
- debonaire *adj.* submissive 347
- deeme *v.* judge 166, deemeth 25
- deffame *n.* bad reputation,
dishonor 191
- deffyne *v.* state (in conclusion)
463
- dele *v.* have dealings with; have
sexual intercourse with 52
- deprave *v.* calumniate 188
- deshonest *adj.* shameful 184
- destourbe *v.* distract; impede 118
- deynous *adj.* haughty 150
- deyntee *n.* pleasure; honor 249
- discreet *adj.* judicious 384
- disease *n.* distress 277
- doctryne *n.* edification 426
- dreedful *adj.* timorous, reverent
348
- eek *adv.* also, moreover 120
- empryse *n.* undertaking 119
- encheson *n.* reason 429
- endytith *v.* composes, writes 208
- engyn *n.* ingenuity; talent 296
- ensure *v.* assure 29
- entalentid *pp.* stimulated 338
- enteer *adj.* complete 337
- fair *adj.* appropriate or becoming;
courteous 64
- falsen *v.* be false to 307
- feere *n.* company 458
- feers *adj.* violent 153
- filthes *n.* foul things 262
- foorth *adv.* do ~, onwards (emph.),
keep on
- for *conj.* because 119; so that 212
- force *n.* what ~, what does it
matter 273
- forthy *adv.* therefore 264
- fulfillid *adj.* filled 150
- gabbiith *v.* lies; speaks foolishly
142
- gentillesse *n.* good breeding,
graciousness 137
- gentils *n.* gentlefolk 135
- good *n.* benefit, advantage 120
- hardily *adv.* assuredly 445
- heeste *n.* command 354
- hente *v.* caught 257
- hepid *adj.* accumulated 407
- hir, hire *adj.* their 14, 19
- hoomlynnesse *n.* over-familiarity
132
- yen *n.* eyes 19
- yimaginacioun *n.* ideas 235
- importable *adj.* unendurable 26
- impressioun *n.* mental
formulation 370
- I whet *pp.* stimulated, roused 243
- keepith *v.* cares 52
- kidde *v.* showed 314; kythen on,
demonstrate 224
- labbyng *adj.* blabbing 116
- lakken *v.* find fault with 192
- lay *v.* belief, faith 433
- lees *n.* falsehood 444
- leeve *v.* believe, trust 56
- leffe *v.* remained 443
- lewde *adj.* stupid, foolish 282
- light *adj.* glad 58; easy 127;
frivolous 141
- list *v.* be pleased 27; wishes, wish
138, 189
- lowe *n.* flame 61; on a ~, on fire
- lusty *adj.* pleasant, cheerful 472
- maddying *n.* madness 131
- make *n.* mate 57
- maugree *prep.* in spite of 232
- maugree *n.* ill-will, displeasure,
spite 376
- meeneth *v.* intends, asserts 24
- mees *n.* message 334
- mishappid *pp.* met with bad luck
217
- moot *v.* may 35
- mowe *v.* may, might 278

- muse *v.* consider 238
 nakid *pp.* stripped 353
 namely *adv.* especially 135; that is 216
 nolde *v.* would not 404
 nyce *adj.* foolish, fussy, sluggish, dissipated 148
 offense *n.* don ~, attack 12
 or *adv.* before 369
 othir *whyle adv.* sometimes 49
 outrage *n.* don ~, harm, affront 12
 ouerlede *v.* dominate 332
 pak *n.* company 110
 par cas *adv.* by chance 164
 preeue *v.* prove 55, foule moot he ~, he may be found wanting
 procès *n.* by ~, in course of time 43
 prys *n.* reputation 308
 purpose *v.* intend 372
 pyne *n.* suffering 399
 qweeme *v.* please 39
 qweynte *adj.* over-ingenious 152
 quitte *v.* repay 304, qwitten 263, qwyth 97
 rechelees *adj.* heedless 149
 rede *v.* advise 91
 rehercen *v.* repeat 201
 remes *n.* realms 85
 reparatrice *n.* female restorer 403
 repreef *n.* shame, reproof 205
 right anoon *adv.* immediately 28
 rode *n.* ride, journey on horseback 102
 ryde *v.* travel; copulate with 106
 rym *n.* rhythm or metre 209
 sad *adj.* steadfast 301
 semblable *adj.* similar 390
 shamefast *adj.* modest, shy 347
 shap *n.* shape; genitals 171
 shapith *v. refl.* ~ him, prepares himself 126
 shende *v.* destroy 132
 sit *v.* befits 339
 Sitheree *n.* Citherea, Venus 5
 snak *n.* bite; share 109
 softe *adv.* timidly 145
 sofil *adj.* clever 299
 souffyse *v.* suffice 264
 souneth *v.* inclines, tends 90
 special *adv.*, in ~, particularly 198
 stele *n.* handle 50
 sterte *v.* burst out 38
 steruen *v.* die 28
 strah *interj.* straw, an exclamation of contempt 327
 sueth *v.* follows 145
 suspense *n.* put in ~, defer 409
 susteneth *v.* maintains 161
 tapplie *v.* to be attached to 89
 teene *n.* vexation, trouble 242
 tescheewe *v.* to avoid, 165; abstain from 270
 their *n.* the air 472
 thewes *n.* qualities 339
 trete *v.* discuss 129
 trowe *v.* believe 206
 twynnest *v.* separate 104
 vnlust *n.* disinclination 227
 vnnethes *adv.* scarcely 380
 vnthrift *n.* foolishness, nonsense 152
 vsage *n.* han...in ~, have the habit of 92
 veray *adj.* pure, sheer 228
 villenye *n.* shame, dishonor 115
 weenyng *v.* thinking 44°
 welthe *n.* happiness; spiritual well-being 359, 361
 wight *n.* person 24
 wight *adj.* nimble 143
 witen *v.* know 98; wiste, knew 122; woot, knows 364
 withseye *v.* deny 108
 wold *v.* wished 305
 wont *adv.* accustomed 186
 wroughte *pp.* did, brought about 72
 wyse *n.* manner 63
 wytith *v.* blame 376
 yeue *v.* give 454
 yit *adv.* indeed (emph.) 71

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