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CHAUCER. THE LEGEND  
OF GOOD WOMEN**

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**GEOFFREY CHAUCER & WALTER W. SKEAT**

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THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

*SKEAT*

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Clarendon Press Series

# CHAUCER

## THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

EDITED BY THE

REV. WALTER W. SKEAT, LITT.D.

*Rivington and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon  
in the University of Cambridge*

'Dan Chaucer, the first warbler, whose sweet breath  
Preluded those melodious bursts, that fill  
The spacious times of great Elizabeth  
With sounds that echo still'

*A Dream of Fair Women*

Oxford

AT THE CLARENDON PRESS

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## INTRODUCTION

I HAVE undertaken the present edition of Chaucer's 'Legend of Good Women' because none of the existing editions give a wholly satisfactory text, nor do they give more than extremely meagre comments upon the various points of interest connected with the poem. Some account of former editions will be given below, following upon the descriptions of the MSS.

The present poem presents several points of peculiar, I might almost say of unique interest. It is the immediate precursor of the Canterbury Tales, and enables us to see how the poet was led on towards the composition of that immortal poem. This is easily seen, upon investigation of the date at which it was composed.

### DATE OF THE POEM : A.D. 1385.

The question of the date has been well investigated by Ten Brink ; but it may be observed beforehand that the allusion to the 'queen' in l. 496 has long ago been noticed, and it has been thence inferred, by Tyrwhitt, that the Prologue must have been written after 1382, the year when Richard II. married his first wife, the 'good queen Anne.' But Ten Brink's remarks enable us to look at the question much more closely.

He shows that Chaucer's work can be clearly divided into three chief periods, the chronology of which he presents in the following form.

### FIRST PERIOD.

1366 (at latest). The Romaunt of the Rose.

1369. The Book of the Duchesse.

1372. (end of the period).

## SECOND PERIOD.

1373. The Lyf of Seint Cecile.  
 The Assembly of Foules.  
 Palamon and Arcite.  
 Translation of Boethius.  
 Troilus and Creseide.
1384. The House of Fame.

## THIRD PERIOD.

1385. Legend of Good Women.  
 Canterbury Tales.
1391. Treatise on the Astrolabe.

It is unnecessary for our present purpose to insert the conjectured dates of the Minor Poems not here mentioned.

The poems of the First Period were composed before Chaucer set out on his Italian travels, i. e. before December, 1372, and contain no allusions to writings by Italian authors. In them, the influence of French authors is very strongly marked.

The poems of the Second Period were composed after that date. The Life of Seint Cecile already marks the author's acquaintance with Dante's *Divina Commedia*; lines 36-51 are, in fact, a free translation from the *Paradiso*, canto xxxiii. ll. 1-21. See my note to this passage, and the remarks on the 'Second Nun's Tale' in my Introduction to the Tale of the Man of Lawe, &c. The *Parlement of Foules* contains references to Dante and a long passage translated from Boccaccio's *Teseide*. See my notes to that poem; pp. 289, 292, 293, &c. The original *Palamon and Arcite* was also taken from the *Teseide*; for even the revised version of it (now known as the *Knight's Tale*, and containing, doubtless, much more of Chaucer's own work) is founded upon that poem, and occasionally presents verbal imitations of it. *Troilus* is similarly dependent upon Boccaccio's *Filostrato*. The close connection between *Troilus* and the translation of Boethius is seen from several considerations, of which it may suffice here to mention

two. The former is the association of these two works in Chaucer's lines to Adam—

'Adam scriveyn, if ever it thee befallē  
*Boece* or *Troilus* to wryten newe.

Ch. Minor Poems, ed. Skeat, p. 117.

And the latter is the fact that Chaucer inserts in *Troilus* (book iv. stanzas 134-148, ed. Morris) a long passage on predestination and free-will, taken from Boethius, book v. proses 2, 3; which he would appear to have still fresh in his mind. It is probable that his Boethius preceded *Troilus* almost immediately; indeed, it is conceivable that, for a short season, both may have been in hand at the same time.

There is also a close connection between *Troilus* and the House of Fame, the latter of which shows the influence of Dante so strongly, that it is reasonable to suppose that it is the very poem to which Lydgate gave the name of 'Dante in English'; see *Intro.* to *Minor Poems*, p. xii. This connection will appear from comparing *Troil.* v. stt. 52-55 with *Ho. Fame*, 2-54; and *Troil.* i. st. 74 with *Ho. Fame*, 639, 640. See Ten Brink, *Studien*, p. 121. It would seem that the House of Fame followed *Troilus* almost immediately. At the same time, we cannot put the date of the House of Fame later than 1384, because of Chaucer's complaint in it of the hardship of his official duties, from much of which he was released (as we shall see) early in 1385. Further, the 10th of December is especially mentioned as being the date on which the House of Fame was commenced (l. III), the year being probably 1383 (see note to that line).

It would appear, further, that the Legend was begun soon after the House of Fame was suddenly abandoned, in the very middle of a sentence. That it was written later than *Troilus* and the House of Fame is obvious, from the mention of these poems in the Prologue; ll. 332, 417, 441 (pp. 26, 33, 34). That it was written at no great interval after *Troilus* appears from the fact that, even while writing *Troilus*, Chaucer had already been meditating upon the goodness of Alcestis, of which the Prologue to the Legend says so much. Observe the following passages