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Chaucer's Legendary Good Women

Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* is a testament to the disparate views of women prevalent in the Middle Ages. Dr Percival contends that the complex medieval notion of Woman informs the structure of the poem: in the Prologue Chaucer praises conventional ideas of female virtue, while in the Legends he shows a humorous scepticism, apparently influenced by contemporary antifeminist traditions. The debate Chaucer thus promotes could be relied on to entertain many medieval readers, while at the same time it demonstrates the power of the vernacular translator/poet to handle language wittily and to play with the august texts of the past. This is a comprehensive account of the *Legend's* interpretative puzzles, which does not ignore the element of political writing, and adds to a close and nuanced reading of the text an examination of literary, historical and social contexts.

Dr Florence Percival's special interests, apart from Chaucer, are in the field of Arthurian literature, in particular the Tristan legend and Sir Thomas Malory. She is at present collaborating on an annotated bibliography of Middle English Bible translations.

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*For Norman and Edith Weber
and Maud Morrison*

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Note on the text

I refer to the two Prologues to the *Legend of Good Women* as Prologue F and Prologue G, or simply F and G, especially when prefacing line numbers. *LGW* is sometimes used before line numbers, if it is not otherwise clear that the lines are from the *Legend of Good Women*.

I often use 'the *Legend*' as an abbreviation for the *Legend of Good Women* as a whole, but an unitalicised use of 'Legend' refers to a story in the poem's tale collection, one of the Legends of good women, e.g., 'Legend of Cleopatra'.

Chaucer sometimes uses spellings for the names of the heroines and heroes of his Legends which differ from the generally accepted spellings of these characters from mythology. Where this is the case, I use Chaucer's spellings to refer to his characters, and the usual spellings for other versions of the classical stories; thus Phillis and Demophon are the protagonists of Chaucer's tale, but Phyllis and Demophoon refer to Ovid's characters.

Abbreviations

<i>BD</i>	<i>The Book of the Duchess</i>
<i>Bo</i>	<i>Boece</i>
<i>CA</i>	<i>Confessio Amantis</i>
<i>CFMA</i>	Les classiques français du moyen âge
<i>ChauR</i>	<i>Chaucer Review</i>
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>EETS</i>	Early English Text Society
<i>ELH</i>	<i>English Literary History</i>
<i>HF</i>	<i>The House of Fame</i>
<i>JEGP</i>	<i>Journal of English and Germanic Philology</i>
<i>JWCI</i>	<i>Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes</i>
<i>KnT</i>	<i>The Knight's Tale</i>
<i>LGW</i>	<i>The Legend of Good Women</i>
<i>MÆ</i>	<i>Medium Ævum</i>
<i>MED</i>	<i>A Middle English Dictionary</i>
<i>MkT</i>	<i>The Monk's Tale</i>
<i>MLN</i>	<i>Modern Language Notes</i>
<i>MLR</i>	<i>Modern Language Review</i>
<i>MLT</i>	<i>The Man of Law's Tale</i>
<i>MP</i>	<i>Modern Philology</i>
<i>MS</i>	<i>Mediaeval Studies</i>
<i>N&Q</i>	<i>Notes and Queries</i>
<i>OED</i>	<i>The Oxford English Dictionary</i>
<i>PMLA</i>	<i>Publications of the Modern Language Association</i>
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia latina</i>
<i>PQ</i>	<i>Philological Quarterly</i>
<i>RES</i>	<i>Review of English Studies</i>
<i>Romaunt</i>	<i>The Romaunt of the Rose</i>
<i>RPr</i>	<i>The Reeve's Prologue</i>
<i>RR</i>	<i>Roman de la Rose</i>
<i>SAC</i>	<i>Studies in the Age of Chaucer</i>

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Abbreviations

SATF	Société des Anciens Textes Français
SNT	<i>The Second Nun's Tale</i>
SP	<i>Studies in Philology</i>
SqT	<i>The Squire's Tale</i>
TC	<i>Troilus and Criseyde</i>
WBPr	<i>The Wife of Bath's Prologue</i>