



The Book Of The Duchess

Geoffrey Chaucer

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The Book of the Duchess, also known as The Deth of Blaunche is the earliest of Chaucer's major poems, preceded only by his short poem, "An ABC," and possibly by his translation of The Romaunt of the Rose. Most sources put the date of composition after 12 September 1368 (when Blanche of Lancaster died) and 1372, with many recent studies privileging a date as early as the end of 1368. At the beginning of the poem, the sleepless poet lies in bed, reading a book. A collection of old stories, the book tells the story of Ceyx and Alcyone. The story tells of how Ceyx lost his life at sea, and how Alcyone, his wife, mourned his absence. Unsure of his fate, she prays to the goddess Juno to send her a dream vision. Juno sends a messenger to Morpheus to bring the body of Ceyx with a message to Alcyone. The messenger finds Morpheus and relays Juno's orders. Morpheus finds the drowned Ceyx and bears him to Alcyone three hours before dawn. The deceased Ceyx instructs Alcyone to bury him and to cease her sorrow, and when Alcyone opens her eyes Ceyx has gone. The poet stops relaying the story of Ceyx and Alcyone and reflects that he wished that he had a god such as Juno or Morpheus so that he could sleep like Alcyone and describes the lavish bed he would gift to Morpheus should he discover his location. Lost in the book and his thoughts, the poet suddenly falls asleep with the book in his hands. He states that his dream is so full of wonder that no man may interpret it correctly. He begins to relay his dream.

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