THE BOOK OF THE DUCHESS

THE BOOK OF THE DUCHESS is the earliest of Chaucer's major poems. His translation of the Roman de la rose may have preceded it, and his ABC (which tradition holds was written at the request of the Duchess Blanche) was probably also an earlier work; double-sonce some of the lyrics of love mentioned in the Prologue to The Legend of Good Women and some of the many songs and levecheys mentioned in the Retraction also preceded the composition of this poem. At any rate, despite occasional roughness of meter, The Book of the Duchess shows Chaucer already in full command of the idiom and conventions of the poetry of love, which was to be one of his major concerns for the next two decades.

There is a good deal of evidence, both external and internal, that Chaucer wrote The Book of the Duchess to commemorate the death of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster and wife of John of Gaunt. In the Prologue to The Legend of Good Women Chaucer says that he wrote a poem called "The Death of Blanche the Duchesse" and this is almost certainly what he later calls "the book of the Duchesse" (Retr. X.1086). A note in the Fairfax Manuscript, evidently in the hand of the Elizabethan antiquary John Stowe, says that this poem was written at John of Gaunt's request. In the poem it seems likely that the word oxide is a transliteration pun in several instances, notably in line 948, "And goode faire White she her." There is also an apparent pun of word plays in 1318-19, where white appears and John of Gaunt is hinted at in "sepyt Johan" and where there are probable references to Richmond and Lancaster (Gaunt was Earl of Richmond and Duke of Lancaster). While this would seem to settle the date of the composition of the poem, which is usually placed between 1369 and 1372, at the latest, there are, in fact, two questions that must raise doubts. In the first place, though the generally accepted date of Blanche's death is 12 September 1369, a more recent study suggests that 12 September 1368 is the probable date. In the second place, it has been argued that the poem was not, as hitherto supposed, written within a few months of Blanche's death but for one of the later and highly elaborate annual commemorations.

At the time of writing the poem Chaucer was strongly influenced by some of the sophisticated French poems, notably Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun (authors of the Roman de la rose), Froissart, and Machaut. To the last of these in particular he owes a special debt, not only in the many lines he borrows for The Book of the Duchess, but also in the form of his elegy. One of Guillaume de Machaut's best and the Juronnet du Roys de Bavay, recounts how the poet walks in the meadows one morning in late April and overhears a lady and a knight lamenting; she because her true love has died, he because his beloved has proved faithless. They argue about which has the greater cause for sorrow, and eventually Guillaume takes them to the court of love of the King of Bohemia (Behainaine). The King's verdict is that infidelity, rather than bereavement, merits the greater grief. It has been plausibly suggested that in The Book of the Duchess the Dreamer's supercilious questions of the Black Knight are instrumental in making him declare that he knew perfect and reciprocated love cut off eventually by death, and that it is thus demonstrated to Gaunt out of his "own" mouth that his situation is identical to that of the Lady in the Behainaine. The composition poem, the Juronnet du Roys de Bavay, gives judgment in favor of a woman, and a number of

lines are borrowed by Chaucer from that work. Perhaps a more specific and historical relationship, setting the ideal of a lady's against a back-dropped of tragedy, lies in the opening 656 lines of the Naseiur, in which the horrors of the outbreak of the Black Death (1349) are described. Chaucer's quotations from the Naseiur may well have reminded his audience of the "horribles merveilles/Surtout autres dessempaires, /Donne homere powr avoit memoires," the horrifying wonder, greater than any other than one can recall. (Blanche's only sister had died of that disease and it was the cause of death of her father and of Blanche herself.) It is possible that the recollection of the countless thousands who mourned their dead was intended to provide Gaunt with the consolation of companionship in grief.

Critics have argued about the possibility that Chaucer's depiction of the Narrator in The Book of the Duchess may contain autobiographical elements. No doubt there are instances in his work when this is so, as in some details of the self-portrait in The House of Fame: but the highly formalized narrative-pessoa of French courtly poetry, often melancholy and lost in itself, is a common figure that Chaucer knew very well from using that of The Book of the Duchess represents Chaucer himself. The comic touches of exaggeration or inconspicuous that seem to individual can be found in Machaut, whose influence on Chaucer has already been noted. The distant effect of the dream motif makes it easier for Chaucer to offer consolation to Gaunt by presenting his patron as a mourning knight recalling the beauty, outward and inward, of his wife. The poem is a marvellous blend of comedy and pathos, of scenes of chivalry and of a wincey puppy, yet with the leitmotif "To lyed while sure lyse lathen." The intricate tripartite structure of dying Narcissus, grief-stricken Alcione, and mourning Knight gives it further, a sense of form that is both intellectually and aesthetically satisfying.

COLIN WILCOXSON

The Book of the Duchess

I have grete wonder, be the lyght, How that I lyke, for day ne nyght I may nat slepe wel nyght nyght; I have so many an ydel thought; Purly for defaute of slepe That, by my trouthe, I take no kep Of nothing, how hyst cometh or gooth, Ne me nys nything leef noo looth. Al is ryche good to me — Joye or sorrow, when hym be — For I have fellege in nything. This text was edited by LARRY D. BEMSON.

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This book is only available in its entirety in the image linked, as it contains poetry and requires careful reading. The full text is not provided here due to its nature and the limitations of text-based data.
The Book of the Duchesse

Of Egypte, he that redde so

The kynges metrery Phazon,

No more no than the leste of us;

Ne nat nacraty Macroebus

(He that wroth al dh‘aryxycun)

That he metere kyng Scipion,

The noble man, the Africain —

Suche marvayles furished than),

I trowe, areede my dreemz even.

Loo, thus hyt was; thys was my sweeven.

Me thoght thus: that kynt was May,

And in the lawereynge I lay

(Me metere thus) in my bed al nakned

And loketh forth, for I was wakd

With smale foules a grete byt

That had affrayed me out of my slepe

Thogh noue and sweneesse of her song.

And, as me metere, they state among

Upon my chambre roof wythhous

Upon the tyle, othur aboute,

And songe, everyge in hyt wyse,

The moste solenmpn servise

By mothe that ever man e, y trowe,

HAD hord, fer som e hem song lowe,

Som hig, and al e oon accord.

To telle shortly, an e word,

Was never herd so swene a seyven

But hyt had e thyng of seyven —

So mer e a song, so swene eerronce,

That eet, for the toun of Tewyns

I nole but I herd he hem syng;e;

For e my chambre gast e syngge

Thogh syngge of her armony;

For instrument nor molayye

Was nowhere herd yet half swene ;

Nor of accord half smeere;

For ther was noon of hem that feeund

To syngge, for ech of hem hym peynd

To fyndye oon merceffy nores.

They rye sperd not her thoros;

And soothe e seyn, my chamber was

Ful wel depynte, and with glas

Were al the wyndowes wel yglased

Ful cler e, and nat an hoole creased,

That to beholde was grete joye.

For hoole at the story of Trye

Was in the glaswyng wyroght thus,

Of Esek and of kyng Primus,

Of Achilles and of kyng Lamedon,

And eye of Medea and of Jason,

Of Paris, Elixe, and of Layveny.

And alle the wylls with colours ynz

Were peynedy, bothe tewe and glosy;

Of all the Romance of the Rose.

My wyndowes were shete echos,

And thogh the glas the sone shone

Upon my bed with hyghte beemes,

With many glade glide stremes;

And eke the wyllken was so fair —

Blew, hymt, cleere was the snye,

And ful atempte for soche hyt was;

For neder to cold nor hooz ynz,

Ne e in al the wyllken was a clywede.

And as I lay thus, would lounde

Me thoght I herde an hunte bowwe

T‘assy snye horn and fer to knowe

Whether hyt were cler e or hors e soun.

And I herde gygte bothe up and soun

Men, hors, houndes, and othr thynge;

And al men spoken of huntyng.

Wery thay wold see the heer with stregth,

And how the heer had unghenthe

So moche embossed — y nor now what.

And how thay wold co-heyngyne, goon;

I was rightly gyled, and up anco;

Tock my hors, and forth I woned

Out of my chambre; I never stere

Til I com e the field wythouse.

Their overyer y a gezt roote

Of huntes e ek e o f ooresters,

With many relyses and lymeres.

The Book of the Duchesse
And byed hem to the forest faste.
And I with hem. So at the laste
I asked him if he had a lyner:
"Say, felowe, who shall hunte here?"
Quod I, and he answered aye:
"Thy, Sempiope Osumen,"
Quod he, "and ye here faire by:"
"A Goddess half, or good tyne!" quod I, [490]
"Go we famer!" I said to gyde,
Whan we came to the forest syde,
Every man drive ryght ancon
As to harchyse fil to doon.
At the uncuplyge of hys houndes
With ymynne a while the hert yfondes yd,
Ytelowyed, and allusel faste.
Longe ymne, and so at the faste
Thert he rused and staid away
Fro all the houndes a privy way.
The houndes haued overhene-hym alle
And were on a darect yfalle.
The whyrth the hunte wonder faste
Blew a frolyse at the laste.
I was go落地 fro my tree,
And so I wente, ther cam be mene
A whelp, that faunsted me as I stood,
That hadd yfowled and koude no good.
Hert cam and creeped to me as lowe.
Right as hyt hadd ymkevow,
Helde doun hys head and joynd hys eres,
And leyde al smerde doun hys here.
I wolde have kauht hyt, and aume
Hyt fessude and was fro me goun;
And I hyn solved, and hyt fowth wente
Doun by a fowre grove wente
Ful thikke of gras, ful softe and sweate.
With fowl cam, faire under fatte,
And linct used; hyt semed thus,
For both Flore and Zephirus,
They two that make floures growe,
Had mad ther dwellynge ther; I crowe;
For hit was, to othelode,
As thogh the eterne eyvre woldte
To be gayer then the heaven,
To have moo floures, swiche sevne,
As in the welles storest
Hyt had forgotte the poverete
That wynner, thogh hyt colde morwes,
Thogh hyt bad hyt suffer, and ther sewes;
All was forgotten, and that was sene,
For al the woodes was wexen grene;
Swemense of dest had mad hyt waxe,
Hyt ys no seede eke for to axe
 Wher there were many grene groves,
Or thikke of trees, so ful of leves;
And every tree stod by hymselfe
Bro other wel ten feet or twelve
So grene tree, so huge of stengthe,
Of foure or fay fadme lengthe,
Close withoutow bough and nikke.
 With creopes brode, and she as thikke—
They were ras an ymke asonde-
That hit was shadowe overal under.
And many a hert and many an hynde
Was both before me and behynynde.
Of fouren, soweres, bulken, does
Was ful the woodes, and many croes,
And many squirelles that sere
Ful high upon the trees and eres,
And in hit manner many of hys heres.
Shortly, hyt was so ful of bestes
That thogh Aegus, the noble nesourne,
See to reekes, and hyt fowth wente
And reken with his figures ten—
For by the figures mowte al ke,
If yf she be craufy, renke and nownbre,
And tell of every thing the sence-
405 Here is the goddess of flowers, Zephirine, the west wind.
406 A fairer creature.
407 She and the others were seven times as many.
408 Where thither: grooves branched.
409 It was thick asunder, the branches went thick on.
410 Bodies of the wind.
411 Fairer creature.
412 Wonde, wonder, where are you?
413 The fields of gods.
414 God of wind.
415 Of a goodly mansion in the air, well proportioned.
416 God of wind, of a pleasant place.
417 She was as she was, and all the rest.
418 Formerly, in the midst.
419 Goddess, this is the manner of the goddess.
420 Of the gods, very lovely, no more.
421 He not only, but all his remaining, her appearance is to her.
422 For my part.
423 So it was.
424 Mysterious gods.
425 The fire of Elysium.
426 Of the gods, good fortune.
427 Of the gods; no more.
428 I used to understand her, but she doth not.
429 Or on the numbering of their lines, see textual note.
THE BOOK OF THE DUCHESS

337

My countenance ys nywe
d
And al shaved, where so I be;
My pees in pleynesse and in warre;
Alas; how may my soule be warre?
My boldnesse ys turned to shame,
For Fortune hath playbook a game.
Este chese with me, alas the white!
The trystenelles fals and full of gyle,
That al behoeth and nothyngh balte,
She goth upryght and yet she halt,
That bagbeth foule and loketh faire,
she dispisse de banteke.
That skometh many a creature
An ydole of fals portrayure
Yshe, for she wol some wey; She is the monstres hed yweyren,
As fythe over-yewrawd with flourice.
Hir mony wearpehipe and hir flour ys
To lyn, for that ys hir natur;
Without feyth, lawe, or mesure
She ys fals, and ever laughtere
With oon eye, and that other wypynge.
That ys brught up the set al doun.
I lyke hir to the scorpion.
That ys a fals, flaternyte beste,
For with his bed he makeh feste,
But al amyldyk hys flaternyte
With hys tylke he wol styngyn.
And ensyneynge; and so wol she.
She ys th envoyse charite.
That ys yr fals and sement welh;
So nemeth she hir false whel.
Aboys, for hir ys notyngh stable
Now by the fryre, now at table.
For oon oon hooth she thyth plent.
She ys piey of enchauntement,
That sement oon and ys not soo.
That falshe! What hath she doo;
Trowest thou? By oreure Lord I wol the seye:
"At the ches with me she gan to pleye;
With hir false draughtes dyveres
She stael on and tok my fers.

338

And whan I sowyth my fers away,
Alas, I kouthe no lenger playe;
But sayde, 'Falsewol, sweere, yswes;
And farewel al that ever thy saye'
"Therwith Fortune sydeye 'Clerk her!'
And so in the eyd pokety of the cheekere,
With a pouem errant! Alas,
Full craflyer to playe she was.
Thyns Asballus, and kneve the irampades,
First of the ches, so was hys name.
But God wolde I had conyes or twye
Yrrou and konwe the irampades
That kowde the Greek Pitagorees!
I shulde have playd the bet at ches
And kep my fers the bet therby.
And thowge wher? For torewse
I holde that wych nat worth a street?
Hyr had be never the bet for me,
For Fortune can so many a weyle
Then be but fewe kan hir begylle;
And she sye the the lase to blanne;
And sey I wolde have do the same,
Before God, haddle I ben as she;
She syghe the more excused be.
For this I say yet more thereto:
Had I be God and myghtes have do
My wille whan my fers kauchte,
I wolde have drawne the same draughte.
And also wyd God wyve me rose,
I dar wel swere she tooke the beste.
But through that draughte I have lorn
My blisse; alias, that I was born.
For evermore, y trove trewey
For al my wyly, my lust holly
YS turneth, but yet, what to se thyn?
Be oure Lord, hys to deye soone.
For nothing he lyve hys nochyn,
But lyve and deye right in that thoghyn;
For ther nys planetes in firmament,
Ne in ayr ne in erihe noy element,
That they ne give me a yffe thane.

524-529

"Ys, th'amendes is light to make."
Quod he, "for ther leyth noon thereto;
There yis nothyngh misayde nor do.
Loo, how goode spak thy kynght.
As hit had be another wyght;
I saw and that, gan me agaynste.
With hym, and fond hym so treble.
Right wonder skylful and resounable.
As me thought, for al hyt bale.
Anoon right I gan fynde a tale
To hym, to take wher I myght ought
Have more knovynge of hys thought.
"Sir," quod he, "this game is doon."
I holde that this hert be goon;
Thys huntes koon hym newere see."
"Y do no for therof," quod he;
"My thoughe y be theron never a del."
"By porre Lord," quod he, "y tow yow well;
Right so me thinketh by yore chere.
But air, oy thyng wol yere here.
Me thynketh in gres sorowe I yow see;
But cureen, aile, yl that yee.
Wolde ought discoure me yere woow,
I wolde, as wy God helpe me soo,
Amende hys, yf I kan or may.
Ye eswpe hys be assay, or;
For, by my trouthe, to make yow hool
I wol do al my power hool.
And rebelled of my sorowes smerte;
Parasure hys may see yere hereto,
That semeth ful ask under yere syde."
With that he loked on me aysde,
As who sayth. "Nay, that wol not be."
"Grasse myfre frend, friend," quod he,
"I thanke the that shou wolden soo.
But hert may never the rather be doo.
No man may my sorow glide,
That makeh my hewe to falls and fade,
And heth my understonde wyncom
That me ys wo that I was born!
May nought make my sorow styde,
Nought at the remedyes of Ordeyre,
Ne Oripheus, god of melody,
Ne Dedalus with hit playes syre;
Ne helte me may no phusitian;
Noghe Yppolites Greadus.
Me yis wo that I lyve hourely:twelve.
But chnoo wol assay-hyme selfe.
Whether his hert kan have peace
Of any sorowe, lat hym see me.
Y wyche, that deh had mad al naked
Of al the blisse that ever was made,
Ywothe woes of alle wyghtes,
That hate my deyves and my nyghtes;
My lyf, my lastes, be me loothe,
For al theyl and I wol woote.
The pare deh ys so ful my foo
That wolde deye, byt wolde not soo;
For when I folwe hys, hit wol fee;
I wolde have hym, byt yl nat me.
This yis my pynse wythoute red,
Always derynge and be not ded,
That Clenibest, that leveth in heler;
May not of more sorowe selle;
And whoso wisse al, by my trouthe,
My sorowe, but he hadde rowthe.
And piece of my sorowes smerte,
That man hath a fenderly her;
For whose seedeth me first on morowe
May seyns he hath met with sorowe,
Bys an-sorowe, and sorowe ys y.
"Allah and I wol se the why:
My song ys turned to plesynge,
And al myerlye so wepyng.
My godese thoughtes to hervyssete,
In trawlye ys myn ydentesse.
And eke my rope, my wele is woo,
My good ys harm, and evermore.
In wraethe ys turned my plenyng
My deus into sorwpyng.
Myne heyle ys turned into sernesse,
In drede ys al my sikezness.
To deke ys turned al my lythe,
My wyt ys foly, my day ys nyght.
My love ys hase, my step wyakynge,
My mythes and mees ys fyssaryng
529-534
530-533
534-535
536-537
538-544
The Book of the Duchess

And Cyprio died for Nicaea.  
Nolaide noses love, and right thus—  
Hath many another holy doon;  
And for Dalida died Sampson,  
That slough himself with a piper.  
But is no more alive her  
Wolde for a fires make this wood.  
"Why so?" quod he, "byt ys nat so.  
Thou wost ful liyel what thou mest;  
I have fear more than thou wostes."  
"Loo, [sey] how that may be?" quod y.  
"Good sir, tell me a holy  
In what wyse, how, why, and wherefore  
That ye have thus youre bylase lore.  
"Blythe, quod he, "com syne adoun!  
I tell the spore a condition  
That thou shalt holy, with at thy wy,  
Dost thy ennest to herkene him.  
"Ys, yz." "Swerre thy trouthe therno.  
"Glady," "Do thanne holde herent.  
I shal thyght blythe, to God se me save.  
Hoolie, with all the wot I have,  
Here youse as well as I kan."  
"A Goddes halh!" quod he, and began:  
"Syte, quod he, "sith first I kowthe  
Have any mater wyt fro youte,  
Or kyndly understoneding.  
To comprehende in any thyng  
What love was, in myn wyt wy.  
Drewlees, I have ever yere  
Be tributarye and yve rente  
To Love, hoolie with good enuerte,  
And through plentys becometh his thral  
With good wille, body, hert, and al.  
Al this I putte in his seruage,  
As to my lord, and dicre homagere;  
And ful devotly I prayed hym to  
His shulde bestete mynye here so.  
That lyt plesance to hym were  
And worship to my lady dere."  
"And this was large, and many a yer  
That any mater benere was getten ober,  
That I dike thuse, and nyte why;  
I crowe hym cam me kyndely.

Parameor was thereto most able,  
As a white wyd or a tabar,  
For his yez red to cacke and take  
All that men wyll themoyne.  
Whoelh wir men wul portrewe,  
Of goodlyhevede so wel beneve—  
Shortly, that shal y man yeve?  
By God and by hit halwas twelve.  
Hyz was my swete, right as hirselfe.  
She hooed so sittian contenessue,  
So sobewyt and menytenance,  
And Love, that had wel herd my boone,  
Had espyed me thus soone,  
That she fulsome in my thung,  
As helpe me God, so was yskayted  
So sodenly that I retook  
No maner counseley but at hir lik  
And at myn here; for-wyry hir eyen  
So gladly, I crow, myn here seyyn  
That purely the myn owne thought  
Seyde hir were set better servir for hir knight  
Than with another to be wel.  
And hyt was soth, for eyveridyl  
I wil anoon ryght teile the wy why.  
"I saw hygh daynes so comely,  
Carole and synge so sweetyly,  
Laugh and pieke so wanoly,  
And lok so deoberaly.  
So goodly speke and so frendly,  
That certes y rowe that evermor  
Of a bryght helmes so blyeft a treace.  
For every ber in hir hed,  
Soht to seytre, hyt was not red.  
Now he ther berber no bern hyt nas;  
Me thought most yk l gyld hyt was.  
"And whyle I sawe my lady haddel  
Deoberaly, goodly, and safed,  
Simple, of good mogyj, noth to wyde.  
Therto hir look was not styde  
Ne overthorowt, but beset so wel  
Hyr drewe and took up eueridyl  
All that on hir berber behalde.  
Hyr eyen seened anoon she wolde

539 The moone or the sterrys seven,  
For al the wyld so haddye she  
Surmounted hem alle of beaute,  
Of maner, and of confyledynye,  
Of wyt, of hygh and of great gladness,  
Of goodlyhevede so wel beneve—  
Shortly, that shal y man yeve?  
By God and by hit halwas twelve.  
Hyz was my swete, right as hirselfe.  
She hooed so sittian contenessue,  
So sobewyt and menytenance,  
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Ne overthorowt, but beset so wel  
Hyr drewe and took up everidyl  
All that on hir berber behalde.  
Hyr eyen seened anoon she wolde
The Book of the Duchesse

Have mercy — folio wended so —
But hyt was never the rather doun.
Hyt nas no countrefretyth dynynge;
Hyt was evere pure lykynge. 870
That she godesesse, dame Naure, had mad hem opene by mesure
And closeu; for she was evere so glad,
Hyr lykeynge was not foyle spead,
Ne wildely, thogh that she pleyd; 873
But ever, me thought, hir eyne sayde,
'Be God, we wrythe ys al fryvelye.'
'Therewith hir lynes so wylye,
That dulnese was of hir aadrud.
She nas to solvere me to glad;
In alle thynges more mesure
Had never, I crowe, creature.
But manyoon with hire lok she herre,
And that hir ful lynye at herte,
For she knew nothing of her thoghth;
But whether she knew or knew it noorth:
Algar she ne rought of hem a strete —
To gene here love so ner nas he
That wonden at hom than be in Yeude;
The formest was alway behynde. 880
But gooode folk, over al other.
She loved as man ma do hys brothe,
Of which love she was wonder large,
In skillful places that bere charge.
'But whil a vintaid had she therroo'
Alas, myn herre ys wonder wo.
That I ne kan discryve hir yt.
Me lakteth both Englyshe and wit
For to undo hyt at the fulfe.
And eke my spirytis be so dulle
So get a dynys for to dreyse.
I have no wat that las suffey.
To comprehende hir beate.
But that moche day I saye, that she
Was white, redde, fresh, and lvyrly hevede,
And every day heiste newet;
And tegh hir face was alderest.
For certes Naure had swght lest
To make that fayr that trewly she

The Book of the Duchesse

Was her chef patron of beautee,
And chef esameple of al hir werk,
And moussee; for be hyt never so derk,
Me thyseke I se hir ever moo.
And yet moreover, thogh alle tho
That evere livede were now alyve,
Ne sholde have founde to discyere
Yn al hir face a wikked synge.
For hit was sad, sylpule, and bennynge.
"And which a goodly, soft speche
Had that sweise, my lyves leche!"
So frendely, and so wel ryjmound.
Up al recyn al so wel ryjmound,
And sotteable to alle goode
That I dar swere wel, by hir noode,
Of elysquyse was never founde
So sweeney a sownynge facounde,
Ne trewe songed, ne stoned hane,
Ne hir knode hede — that, by the manne
I durste swere, thorpe the hir soge sone,
That that was never yet thogh hir tonge
Man ne woman gretly harmed.
As for hir, was al harm hyd —
Ne lasse flanerygne in hir wryd,
That purely hir simeple record
Was founde as trewe as any bond
Or trouthe of any mannes bond;
Ne chyde she knode never a del;
That knowen al the world wel ful.
But swych a fairinesse of a swak
Had that sweise that boon nor brekke
Nas ther non sende that myssat,
Hyr was whyt, smerthe, streight, and pure flat,
Wythouts hole or cernel-booyn,
As be semynghe she had noone.
Fyr throp, as I have now manyere,
Senned a rond tour of yvoynes,
Of good greneesse, and nought to get.
And gooode faire Wad in hir;
That was my lady name ryght.
She was boode fair and bryght;

The Book of the Duchesse

She hadde not hir name wrong,
Right fair shulder and body long.
She had, and armen, every lyth.
Pertyash, fairthe, not grete therwith;
Pertyash white handes, and nayles rede;
Rounde brestes; and of good brede
Hyr hips were; a streight ful ba.
I knou of hir non other lak
That al hir hynmes were pure semyng.
In as fer as I had knowynge.
Then ther she knoude so wel play.
Whan that hir lynye, that I dar saye
That she was lyk to rych trothe bryght
That every man may take of light
Yngh, and hir hath never the len.
Of maner and of comlynesse
Right so ferde my lady dere.
For every wight of hir manere
Myghte cycleyn yngoli, yf that he wolde,
Yf he had eyen hir to beholde;
For I dar swere wel, yf that she.
Had among ren thousands be,
She wolde have been, at the leeste,
A chefe myrour of al the feste,
Thogh they had stonden in a rowe,
To mennes eyen that knoude have knowen;
For wher so men had plyed or waked,
Me disasse the filawytshype as raide
Withouthe hir that sowngh I cones
As a corowne withoute stones.
Trewly she was, to myn ytt,
The solenf axen of Arabye,
For ther brith never but oon,
Ne swich as she ne knewo I noone.
"To speke of godnesse, trewly she
Hadam as moche debonaire
As ever had Herete in the Bible,
And more, yf more were possyble.
And soit to soyne, therwthylth
She had a wyt so general.
So hool enclymed to alle goode,
That all hir wyt was set, by the rode,
Witouthe malacce, upon gladnesse;
And therro I auhger never yet a lease
"But wherefore that ye telle me tale?

"Right this same, as I have said,

"Was boole at my love leyd;

"For certes she was, that sweet wif,

"My maistresse, my lutt, my lyf,

"My wrooldes, waret, and my goddesse,

"And I hooke thoes and everyth.

""Byoure Lord," quod I, "the true wulle well be;

"Herdele, your love was well beete;

"I now hue myght have done bette,

"Bere? Ne no wyght so wel," quod I.

""Ye were wyght wel, sir," quod I, "passenel.""n

""Nay, wyght wyll be!" "Sire, so do I;

"I love wyght wel, that trewewy

"Yow thought that she was the beate

"And bebolde the alderfaynty.

"Whoe had loket his with your eynyn.

""With my wy, Naye, ale that he seyn

"Seyle and sware wyght was so.

"And thoyg they me hale, I wolde thooe

"Have loved best my lady fere,

"Thogh I had had at the beaute

"That ever had Alcypyeade,

"And al strengthe of Iagoes,

"And thertho the warlysethe

"Of Alcyon, and al the rychease

"That ever was in Iacopo.

"In Cattage, or in Macedoyny,

"Or in Racme, or in Nyvooe;

"And thertho al sahl be,

"As was Esco, to have Ioye,

"That Achilles slough at Troye

"And therto was alle saled

"In a temple, for bothis twoo

"Were slayne, and Almyrages

"(And so seyth Dares Polygnus)

"For love of Poltyna——

"Or ben as it was sowed on the

"I wolde ever, without drede

"Have loved his, for me more nee.

"Nede? Nay, trewe, I gabbbe now;

"Nought 'nede,' and I wol telleth how:

"For of good wille myn herte wolde,

"And eke to love hir I was holde

"As for the fayrest and the beate.

"She was as good, so have I tesse.

"As ever was Peneloppe of Grece,

"Or as the noble wyf Lucrece,

"That was the beste — be telleth thus.

"The Romys, Tyrrus, Lyvyeus——

"She was as good, and nothyng lyk

"(Thogh hir stories be autenys),

"Alage she was as trewe as she.

"But wherefore that I telle thee

"When I first my lady say?

"I was rytong yong, gote to say,

"And ful gret ronde I hadde to lerne;

"When my wyf wolde yorne

"To love, hir was a gret enpreyse.

"But as my wyfrowned best suffise,

"After myn yong childly wy.

"Without drede, I benette hir

"To love hir in my berte wyne,

"To do his worship and the servise

"That I koute thoo, be my trouthe,

"Without fenepruge, blute sloute,

"For wonder feyn I wolde hir se.

"So mouchh byrmed me

"When I first my lady seere

"I was warished of al my sorwe

"Of al day after; all hir were eue.

"Me thought nothing murtherge me greve,

"Were my sorwees never so sinerte.

"And yet she rym in myn herre

"That, by my trouthe, y nobles noght

"For al thys world out of my thought

"I love my lady, noo, treweyly

""Now, by my trouthe, sir," quod I,

"Me thinketh ye have such a chaunce

"As cherisbe wythoute repanente.

"”Repanente? Nay, fy!" quod be,

"Shulde y now repente me.

"That found out first the art of songe;

"For as hys brothres harneszro paro

"Upon hys arroub up and doun,

"The ror that byrpered Troye,

"Or the false Genelleun,

"He that purchased the tresoun

"Of Roundal and of Oliver,

"Nay, while I am alwey her,

"Nay, I wyll sente him new noo.

"Now, goode yere," quod I throo.

"Ye han wel told me herebefore;

"Hyr ys no sude to reliefe nowe,

"How ye saw his fryst, and where.

"But wolde ye telle me the manere

"To hire which was youn fryst speche——

"Thore then wolde you be seleck.

"And how she knewde first your thought,

"Whereth ye loved hir or noght?

"And telleth me eke what ye have lere,

"I herde yow telle herebefore."n

""Yeol," sanye hir, "show neet what thow

"havent more than thow wenzet.

"What los y thot?" quod I tho.

""Nyl she not love yw? Ye byr sooly,

"Or have ye oght doon any?

"That she hath left yw? Ye byr this?

"For Goddes love, telle me al."n

"Before God," quod I, "be my shal.

"I saye ryght as I have seyde.

"On hir was all my love leyd,

"And she the syrnes hat not, never a del

"Noight londe tyne, leve byr well.

"For ryght siker, I dureth nought

"For al this world telle hir my thought,

"Ne I wolde have wrahted hir, trewelv.

"For wostow why? She was ladie

"Of the body; she had the herre,

"And who that hath not may sterre.

"But for to kepme fro yeelstes,

"Trowalle me myn beyneus.

"To make songs, as I best koude,

"And ofsfyme I songe hem loute;

"And made songs thus a gret del

"Alough hir koude not so well

"Songes, ne knowde the art al,

"As koude Lamekeze note Tubal,
And eke, as helpe me God wylde,
I crowe hir wyl be in the dimale,
That was the ten wounedes of Egipte —
For many a word I over-skippe.

In my tale, for pure fere
Lent my wordes myselfe were.

With sorweful herte and woundes dede,
Soft, and squyryke for pure drede.
And shame, and synnynge in my tale
For fere, and myn hewe at pale —
Pull ofte I was bothe pale and red —
Brownyng to hir, I heng the hed;
I dyrste nat ones loke hir on,
For whit, maner, and al was goone.

I syde, "Mery!" and no more.
Hyr nat no gane; hir sat me sore.

"So at the laste, sooth to syre,
Whan that myn hert was come agayn,
To telle shorte al at my speche;
With hool herte I gan hir besche.
That sholde be my lady sweere;
And swor, and gan hir hertely here
Ever to bemost and coren,
And love hir alwey feshly newe,
And never thelde lady have,
And al hir worshop for to save.
As I best koude. I swor hir thin;
For yours is alle that ever thil,
For evermore, myn herte swere!
And never to false yow, but I meet,
I sye, as wys God helpe me soo!
"And to end yow in yow, yow,
God wyl, she accounted nat a stre
Of al my tale, so thoughte me.
To telle shortely right as hir yis,
Threw hir answer wyse hir was this —
I kan not now wel counterfe
Hir worde, but this was the grete
Of hir answer: she syde 'Ney'
At outherly. Alas, that day.

The sorwe I suffered and the woe
That treweyly Cassandra, thin too
Bewrayed the destruccioun
Of Troye and of Ilyoon,
Had never swich sorwe as I doo.

The Book of the Duchess

345

I dyrste no more say thereto
For pure fere, but sai alway;
That treweyly I hadde no newe
Ferther than my beddes bed
Never a day to secche sorwe;
I fonde hir redly every morowe,
For why I loved hir in gene.
"So hir bedel, another yere
I thoughte on I wolde fonde
To do hir knowe and understonde
My wov, and she wel understond
That I ne wilyd thing but god,
And worshop, and to kepe hir name
Over alle thynges, and dere hir shame,
And was so byr hir to serve,
And pites were I shulde serve,
Syth that I willed noon harm, ywis.
So whan my lady knew al this,
My lady yaf me al hooly
The noble yfle of her mercy,
Savyng hir worshop by a weye —
Dreadles, I meene nother weye.
And therwith she yaf me a symyng
I crowe hir was the firste symyng;
But if myn herte was yweye,
Glad, that is no soode to see;
Aye helpe me God, I was yblace
Reynd as fro dest to lyve —
Of al happe the alderbearne,
The gladder, and the monste at reste.

For treweyly that trewee wythe,
When I had wrong and the righ,
She wolde alway so goodly
Pereve me so dehonesty.
In al my yowthe, in al chauce,
She tooke me in hir governance.

Therwyth she was alway so trewee
Our joye was ever ylyche newe;
Oure here were so evente a payre
That never nas that oon contraye
To that other for no woo.
For sothe, ylyche they suffred doo
Oo bylyve and eke oore bothe;
Ylyche they were bothe glad and wrothe;
Al was us oon, withoute were.
And ther we lyved ful manye a yere
So well I kan nat telle bowe."
The Book of the Duchess

Though in none of the manuscripts do the copists assign The Book of the Duchess to Chaucer, his authorship has been generally accepted. It is among his works as "the Death of Blanche the Duchess" in the Prologue to The Legend of Good Women (1418, C 460) and as "the book of the Duchess" in his Retraction (Talen X, 1480). Chaucer's authorship is also attested in Locke's Tale of Folly and Prince (III, 1, Prose 54-5). In the Introduction to the Man of Law's Tale (DE 28) we are told that in his youth Chaucer wrote of Cye and Alcione; while this could refer to another (unknown) work of Chaucer's, the likeness is that the reference is to BL 26-220.

The Prologue MS has a note, evidently in the hand of John Stow, stating that Chaucer wrote the poem at the request of the Duke of Lancaster "principally concerning the death of the said duchess blanche..." (see 905 below, and John Norton-Smith's note, in the facsimile of the Prologue MS, 1797). For internal evidence supporting a dedication to Gaunt and Blanche, see BL 1318-19 and the note below on 1324-29, though there is an apparent discrepancy with regard to Gaunt's age at the time of Blanche's death (445 below). For further references, see the historical notes, see Sydney Sims-Page, John of Gaunt, 1904, especially 74-78 (death of Blanche and her memorial services) and 420 (Gaunt's will, where, in the first clause, he directs that he be interred in St. Paul's Cathedral "fure me treueheynel..." (see note 1237 below). See also John of Gaunt's will, where he bequeaths a portion of his lands to his wife Blanche, who is a "hostess".

As for the poem's narrative techniques, see John of Gaunt, 1904, especially 74-78 (death of Blanche and her memorial services) and 420 (Gaunt's will, where, in the first clause, he directs that he be interred in St. Paul's Cathedral "fure me treueheynel..." (see note 1237 below). See also John of Gaunt's will, where he bequeaths a portion of his lands to his wife Blanche, who is a "hostess".

rigged into Parisia) which occurs in Met. 11.640 (Rob- ertson, 1:152-211). The Echec de la fa, bucole, factor in the foie garcon, is an important detail. In 11.64-134 not only a deep significance lies in the metaphor...a simile, and "lazy bones." 171 blessing (ref. 62, 1927, 270-209, esp. 180-181) notes that the "gift" of hell is a medieval rather than a classical concept. In Met. 11.596-596 Ovid says that the sorcerer's ass and that there is a "bright light"...is his "bestowed upon the madmen,"...surrounded by the "blessing"...the "blessing"

629-83 As fylfe is encountered with fyrince, cf. RR 959-13, where the sentiment is expressed that a goldchain covered with rich cloth or flowers still feels the idea of provencal (Whiting 346). Macbeth's eight hedges 0-8, is the immediate source, however, describing fyrince as "sain foy, sain foy, sain dret és sain muret."

630-32 The point of the example is not to give "sain dret és sain muret" (Fiddelein, law, unjust and extreme) of BD 363-52 and so doing covered with rich cloth. See 811-13 below.

634-41 The scoinne was a common symbol of tranch-y, cf. MERT 404, MERT IV 305-6; MacN 797; and Whiting 809, who quotes a gloss from Ecclesiastes 25:10 to the Wycliffe Bible: "A scoinne that maketh fairsembl with the face and pricketh with the nail to a wildew woman drawn by faterelly, and pricketh (th) decht." cf. Avverbale, REIT 25, 62. The idea is traditional and occurs in Avverbale 60, 43. According to Vincent of Beauvais, the scoinne's face is "something like a monster," and it never comes seeking occasions to do good.


638-39 The scene, however, is more general, it is a group of people dancing the farras. This is a term to describe several people dancing around a central figure, an idea that may be derived from the Greek word for "dance," but the exact meaning is uncertain. The farras was a popular folk dance in medieval Europe, and it was often performed as a form of entertainment or religious celebration. The dancers would move around a central figure, often a leader or a questor, singing and shouting. The dance was believed to have magical properties and was sometimes used in ritual ceremonies.

640-41 The word "souls" is a reference to the dead, and the idea of the dead being able to dance may be a way of honoring them or expressing hope for their eventual release from suffering. The idea of a dance of the dead is a common theme in medieval art and literature, often representing the concept of eternal life and the hope for a better world after death. The dance of the dead is also a symbol of the cyclical nature of life and the continuity of the soul, as well as a way of celebrating the beauty of the human spirit in the face of mortality.

642-43 The idea of the dance of the dead is also connected to the idea of the dance of the living. The farras was a dance that was performed to celebrate life and the joy of being alive, and it was often a way of expressing gratitude for the gift of life. The dance was seen as a way of honoring the dead and the living, and it was a symbol of the unity of life and death. The dance was also a way of expressing hope for the future, and it was often seen as a way of celebrating the beauty of the human spirit in the face of mortality.

644-45 The idea of dancing with the dead may also be connected to the idea of the dance of the living. The dance of the living was a way of expressing gratitude for the gift of life, and it was often a way of honoring the dead and the living. The dance was seen as a way of celebrating the beauty of the human spirit in the face of mortality. The dance was also a way of expressing hope for the future, and it was often seen as a way of celebrating the beauty of the human spirit in the face of mortality.
lieves that Snow's marginal notes show that he understood the riddle.

1946: ‘The riddle of your year: The detail does not appear in Macmillan or RR. This may be a continuation of the reference to Babel in 1946, p. 236, ‘the riddle of the Sphinx in Russia’, but this is rather a long shot and also implies the course of another Asiatic trade route. On the whole subjects, see Lewes, M.G. 3, 197.6; for other explanations see 2.7 3–4.5.

1946: “travels” possibly “a comical disregard for comfort” (Lowes, Rom 2.2111).

1946: 24 With this list of worthless cf. the Remains of de fortune, 10.1–34. Even if there were as wise as Solomon etc. I would never love anyone but my lady’, and also Machaut’s thirty-eight Balade notes (Omnibus, ed. Chichele 2.26–51) where the poet says that he has no interest in seeing the beauty of Abundance, or in seeing Samson’s strength, because, ‘Je vous aise, puisque je vous ma dame’ (‘If I see enough because I see my lady’, and Belaieff, 421–25. The sentence was com- plementary.

1946: 40 Abydiupads: Abydiupads was commonly believed for his beauty, cf. RR 9854, Bo 3.pr.1–44.4. The strength of Encelus (Hercules) was proverbial (Whiting H538), as was the worthiness of Alyssander (Alex- ander, Whiting A83).

1946: 40 Babylon (Babylonians), Carthage (Carthaginians), Macedon (Macedonians), Rome, and the biblical Ninev- (Nineveh) are examples of great cities and empires now fallen.

1946: 40 Aztlyegypt: Aztlyegypt is commonly believed for his beauty, cf. RR 9854, Bo 3.pr.1–44.4. The strength of Encelus (Hercules) was proverbial (Whiting H538), as was the worthiness of Alyssander (Alexander, Whiting A83).

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1344–29 this knight. It seems likely that the author of the Prologue of line 368, the Black Knight, and this knight are separate persons. See Cohn (1:622), following an earlier suggestion, that this knight "plainly intended" Edward III. Conder (CHB 3, 1975, 195–212) suggests that the poem may have been composed for an anniversary service on Blanche's death (the details of which see Lewis, Bulletin of John Rylands Library 21, 1937, 176–92) and in CHB 10, 1975, 87–95, Conder proposes a date post-1371, because only after Gaunt's marriage to Constance (September 1371) did he assume the title of King of Castile and Leon. Conder sees the eighteen-year sickness (cf. 20–45 above) as Ch's period of grief after Blanche's death, and favors accordingly a 1376 date for the composition of ED. See also his discussion of the possible date of composition by Palmer (CHB 4, 1974, 215–61), who demonstrates that Blanche's death was not the fifth year's event on 12 September 1359, but 12 September 1368. For further evidence supporting the 1368 date, see Ferns (CHB 19, 1983, 92–93). There appear to be several examples of word play which connect the poem with Gaunt and Blanche: long saint = "Lancaster" (also called "Lancast," "Longcastle"), while the whole is probably an oblique reference to "Blanche" (cf. the translation in 9480; also, John is Gaunt's namesake; note his = "Richmond." Gaunt, at the age of two, was created Earl of Richmond in Yorkshire and it belonged to him until 1372. (See Tippett, MLN 51, 1916, 250–52 and MLN 52, 1917, 54; Shaw's letter in Asch 45, 1894, 191, where he accepts the above interpretations and would extend his own note on Richmond accordingly; Rücker, FMA 65–951). Baggott, allegorical interpreters of the poem (see references to Huguet and Roberson and to Gardner in 100–10 above) make the lines to imply also the "white city of Jerusalem, on the rich hill of Zion, which is, John described." Similarly, Peck (in Steele Poem., 76) considers that the generic archetype of countess-lady occurs in various manifestations in the poem, "and ultimately emerges from the vision ['rev. f.]'er' of the homeward bound king, where Christ is indeed immemorial."