



The Book of the Duchess

Geoffrey Chaucer

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Danny says

The unnamed narrator is an insomniac and has been suffering of an unnamed melancholy of eight years. One night, he attempts to pass the time by reading a books of fables, possibly Ovid's Metamorphoses or something like it. While reading, he is struck by the tragic story of Cyex and Alcyone, in which Alcyone dies of grief after the death of her husband, King Cyex, at sea. In the dream, Alcyone begs Juno to send her a sign as to whether her husband is alive or dead. Juno sends her messenger to Morpheus, asking the former to ask the latter to inhabit Cyex's body, go to Alyson, and tell her that he is dead. The narrator finishes reading and is most taken by the figure of Morpheus. Very tired and exhausted, he prays that Morpheus brings him sleep and he soon falls asleep. He "wakes up" in his bed chamber with epic stories imprinted on the glass of his windows. Outside is a hunt. Octavian and his men are out hunting a hart. The dreamer follows them until he is distracted by a puppy who leads him to a mourning man in black. The man in black (who stands in for John of Gaunt) is in distress. His wife, a paragon of beauty who stands in for Blanche of Lancaster, has died. He writes poetry to help him cope with her loss. The dreamer tries to console him. When he wakes up, he vows to write a poem about all he has experienced.

Matt says

Really sweet little short poem.
I especially love Chaucer's affected innocent authorial persona.

Rochelle says

Read for a university level Mythology and Literature course. To be compared with Ovid's Metamorphosis: Book XI.

Sarah says

"The Book of the Duchess" is a decently lengthy poem which has a really, really intriguing structure. While to me it seems like kind of a given that the medieval folk were quite fixated on dreams and their significance, Chaucer takes a really interesting stance here that makes for not one, but two good stories. At the opening of the poem, the sleep-deprived speaker (referred to as a poet, possibly Chaucer himself) reads the story of Alcyone and Seys, in which a wife loses her husband at sea. The speaker then proceeds to fall asleep and have a dream about a similar but more time-appropriate situation, in which he finds himself in the same setting as the "Romaunt of the Rose". There, he speaks to a knight who reveals that he has lost his wife. When the speaker awakens, he decides he's going to write a poem about what just happened, thus the reason "Duchess" even exists!

While there's really not a lot to this poem, I find that it is fairly easy to follow as well as just.... interesting. When I imagine a medieval dream sequence, I imagine deep, cryptic allegory and poetical ramblings rife

with Christian talk.

This really isn't the case with "Duchess"- to me, it just seems like Chaucer read a book, fell asleep and had a dream about it, then he thought, "this is so queynt a sweven,/That I wol, by processe of tyme,/Fonde to putte this sweven in ryme/As I can best; and that anoon."

James says

This poem has an unusual structure and I like its atypical (for poetry) conclusion where the knight is suffering because his wife died and not due to unrequited love or something more common for the era. I can't give it 5 stars because it is a bit meandering and not Chaucer's best (of what I have read so far).

Jennifer Irving says

and it was all a dream .

Ygraine says

where *house of fame* i found vast and exhausting ego and perhaps even vaster and more exhausting cynicism, *book of the duchess*, although an earlier and maybe clumsier attempt at constructing a dream vision, contains some note of optimism that i cling to. it's a tale that is structured around struggling towards knowledge - chaucer's retelling of alcyone and ceyx centres on her desire to *know* her husband's fate but her fixation on learning the truth blinds her to the truth junco offers her through her dead husband's mouth, and likewise the poet's desire to know the cause of the black knight's sorrow blinds him to the answer again and again. and yet, through perseverance, an understanding is reached, the knight's sorrow is released through telling his tale and the scales are stripped from the poet's eyes and ultimately, both have grown.

Daniel Wright says

The Riverside Chaucer

Malinda says

I had to read this for class, but I liked it. I thought it was interesting to see how we really haven't changed in the way we deal with grief since the Middle Ages.

Jas says

it was okay, reading this for my Chaucer course but still getting used to the language and all that jazz.

Samuel says

A ruddy nuisance to read, if I'm honest with you.

Arin says

Great imagery and metaphor usage! Best if read in the original text (middle english) though challenging.

Mattkc says

Deep analysis is required to really appreciate the elegy for Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, however if done, it is really a impressively written tale. What less could you expect from Chaucer.

Maan Kawas says

A masterpiece dream poem by Geoffrey Chaucer that is filled with an enchanting world. I loved its unique structure and stories, more particularly the dreams and visions. I loved the story of Ceyx and Alcyone, and the words the dead Ceyx, sent through Juno's assistance to his mourning wife three hours before the dawn, said to his wife were so moving and sad. I loved the images depicted by the poet, such as the chamber with the stained glass windows, the sad knight in black, and the game of chess. The poem reflects' Chaucer's knowledge of classical literature, for instance, Ovid's "Metamorphoses", and his mentioning of the "Romance of the Rose" encourages me to read that work too.
