

Geoffrey Chaucer



*The Book
of the Duchess*

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The Book of the Duchess



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THE PROEM

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- 1 I have gret wonder, be this lighte,
- 2 How that I live, for day ne nighte
- 3 I may nat slepe wel nigh noght,
- 4 I have so many an ydel thoght
- 5 Purely for defaute of slepe
- 6 That, by my trouthe, I take no kepe
- 7 Of no-thing, how hit cometh or goth,
- 8 Ne me nis no-thing leef nor loth.
- 9 Al is y-liche good to me --
- 10 Ioye or sorowe, wherso hyt be --
- 11 For I have feling in no-thinge,
- 12 But, as it were, a mased thing,
- 13 Alway in point to falle a-doun;
- 14 For sorwful imaginacioun
- 15 Is alway hoolly in my minde.
- 16 And wel ye wite, agaynes kynde
- 17 Hit were to liven in this wyse;

18 For nature wolde nat suffyse
19 To noon erthely creature
20 Not longe tyme to endure
21 Withoute slepe, and been in sorwe;
22 And I ne may, ne night ne morwe,
23 Slepe; and thus melancolye
24 And dreed I have for to dye,
25 Defaute of slepe and hevinesse
26 Hath sleyn my spirit of quiknesse,
27 That I have lost al lustihede.
28 Suche fantasies ben in myn hede
29 So I not what is best to do.
30 But men myght axe me, why soo
31 I may not slepe, and what me is?
32 But natheles, who aske this
33 Leseth his asking trewely.
34 My-selven can not telle why
35 The sooth; but trewely, as I gesse,
36 I holde hit be a siknesse
37 That I have suffred this eight yere,

38 And yet my bote is never the nere;
39 For ther is phisicien but oon,
40 That may me hele; but that is doon.
41 Passe we over until eft;
42 That wil not be, moot nede be left;
43 Our first matere is good to kepe.
44 So whan I saw I might not slepe,
45 Til now late, this other night,
46 Upon my bedde I sat upright
47 And bad oon reche me a book,
48 A romaunce, and he hit me took
49 To rede and dryve the night away;
50 For me thoghte it better play
51 Then playen either at chesse or tables.
52 And in this boke were writen fables
53 That clerkes hadde, in olde tyme,
54 And other poets, put in ryme
55 To rede, and for to be in minde
56 Whyl men loved the lawe of kinde.