Sir Orfeo is a reworking of the classical myth of the great musician Orpheus and his wife Eurydice. According to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Eurydice died of a snake-bite at her wedding and went to Hades, the place of the dead. Orpheus undertook to follow her there, and having come before Pluto and Proserpina, the king and queen of Hades, he so pleased them with his music that they granted Eurydice’s release—on the condition, however, that she should follow behind Orpheus as they left Hades and that he should not look back at her. But Orpheus did look back, and Eurydice disappeared into Hades. Ovid’s stories were told and retold during the Middle Ages, and frequently the teller altered the plot to suit his own purposes—in her tale the Wife of Bath (lines 958ff.) substitutes Midas’s wife for his barber as the discoverer of his asses’ ears. The poet of *Sir Orfeo* has given the story a happy ending and has replaced its alien classical elements with familiar elements of medieval folklore. Hades has become the land of Fairye, the medieval otherworld, inhabited by supernatural creatures who seem human in most respects but who exist under laws incomprehensible to ordinary human beings. There is no rational explanation of why the king of Fairye should seize Dame Heurodis (Eurydice), except that by going to sleep under an *impe-tree* (a grafted fruit-tree), she unwittingly violated a taboo and put herself in his power. In folklore, trees are, of course, often given sinister properties: in lines 885 ff. of her tale the Wife of Bath comments that incubi once resided under trees, and in *The Faerie Queene* I.ii.30 the Redcross Knight has a frightening experience with a tree he is sitting under. In the Otherworld Dame Heurodis continues to sleep under a tree—apparently a replica of the one in her own garden.

That the poem was the product of a minstrel seems certain because of the emphasis laid upon the value of music. Orfeo is an excellent harper who welcomes all good harpers to his court. When he becomes a hermit, he keeps his harp near him and plays on it to solace himself. The animals and birds crowd around him in delight—as they did with Orpheus—and like the original Orpheus he frees his wife by his music. When he returns to his own kingdom it is by his harp and his harping that he is identified. Even Orfeo’s steward appreciates music: in most medieval romances stewards are pictured as wicked, for they were the court officers responsible for offering or withholding hospitality for minstrels, and apparently they often withheld it. With unusual tact, the poet depicts a good steward who, partly because of his courtesy to harpers, becomes king after Orfeo’s death.

The poem was probably translated from a French romance of the kind called a Breton lay. As the name implies, this genre of romance had its origin in Brittany, a place noted for its minstrelsy. Other surviving lays share with *Sir Orfeo* a plot involving the supernatural, wedded or romantic love, and a rash promise; they also share the poem’s stylistic simplicity, brevity, and a generally optimistic spirit. Chaucer’s Franklin’s Tale imitates the form, and it is probable that his model was *Sir Orfeo*, whose opening lines the Franklin seems to be echoing in his own story. The English translation was probably made before 1300, but it has survived in only three manuscripts of later date. Some scholars believe that the best of these, the Auchinleck manuscript, may once have been read by Chaucer. Only the Auchinleck manuscript makes the interesting identification of *Traciens* (Thrace) with Winchester: some English minstrel poet obviously adapted the poem to a performance at Winchester, which had, indeed, in Old English times been the seat of a kingdom. (It was probably the same poet who, fractionally learned, names King Pluto and King Juno among Orfeo’s ancestors.)
The text presented here is based on the Auchinleck manuscript, though the spelling has been normalized and readings from the other manuscripts adopted where they seem better than Auchinleck’s. In view of the large amount of evident corruption in all three manuscripts, the editor has made a number of conjectural emendations. The original metrical form was probably octosyllabic couplets with alternating stress, but what has come down to us are loose four-stressed couplets. As in Chaucer, there are many “headless” lines, where the stress falls on the first syllable of the line, even though the syllable is not a rhetorically important one; and also as in Chaucer, while final e is frequently used to achieve an unstressed syllable, it is equally often ignored.

Sir Orfeo

We reden ofte and finden ywrite—
As thise clerkes doon° us wite°—
The layes that been of harping¹
 Been yfounde° of freely° thing.
Some been of werre° and some of wo,
And some of joye and mirth the also,
And some of trecherye and of gile;
And some of happes² that fellen° while,³
And some of bourses° and ribaudye,°
And manye been of fairye.²
Of alle thing that men may see,
Most of love forsooth they be.
In Britain° thise layes been wrought,
First yfounde° and forth ybrought.
Of aventures that felle° by dayes³
The Britons° therof maden layes:
When they mighte owther° ytheere°
Of any merveiles that ther were,
They tooken hem hir harpes with game,°
Maden layes and yaf° hem name.
Of aventures that han bifalle
I can some telle, but nought alle.
Herkneth, lordinges° that been trewe,
I wol you telle of Sir Orfewe.
Orfeo was a riche° king,
In Engelond an heigh lording,
A stalworth° man and hardy bo,°
Large° and curteis° he was also.
His fader was come of King Pluto,
And his moder of King Juno,
That somtime were as goddes yholde°
For aventures that they dide and tolde.
This king sojourned in Traciens°
That is a citee of noble defens°
(For Winchester was cleped° th°
Traciens withouten no°).
Orfeo most of any thing

1. I.e., composed to be sung to the harp.
2. Fairyland, and, more commonly, the other-world and its supernatural inhabitants.
3. Once.
Loved the glee\(^o\) of harping:
\(\text{music}\)
Siker\(^o\) was every good harpour
\(\text{certain}\)
Of him to have muche honour.

Himself he lerned for to harpe,
And laide\(^o\) theron his wittes sharpe;
\(\text{applied} / \text{keenly}\)
He lerned so ther nothing was
A bettre harpour in no plas.\(^o\)
\(\text{place}\)
In al the world was no man bore\(^o\)
\(\text{born}\)
That ones\(^o\) Orfeo sat before,
And\(^o\) he mighte of his harping heere,
But he sholde thinke that he were
In oon of the joyes of Paradis,

Swich melodye in his harping is.

Orfeo hadde a queene of pris\(^o\)
\(\text{excellence}\)
That was ycleped\(^o\) Dame Heurodis,
The fairest lady for the\(^o\) nones\(^o\)
\(\text{that} / \text{matter}\)
That mighte goon\(^o\) on body and bones,
Ful of love and of goodnesse—
But no man may telle hir fairnesse.

Bifel so, the comsing\(^o\) of May,
When merye and hot is the day,
And away been winter showres,
And every feeld is ful of flowres,
And blosme breme\(^o\) on every bough
\(\text{glorious}\)
Overal\(^o\) wexeth\(^o\) merye youngh,
This eeeche\(^o\) queene Dame Heurodis
Took with hire two maides of pris\(^o\)
\(\text{excellence}\)
And wente in the undertide\(^o\)
To playe in an orchard-side,
To see the flowres sprede\(^o\) and-springe
\(\text{open}\)
And to heere the fowles singe.

They setten hem down alle three
Faire\(^o\) under an impe-tree;\(^o\)
\(\text{fairly} / \text{grafted fruit tree}\)
And wel soone this faire queene
Fel on sleepe upon the greene.
The maidens durste hire not awake,
But lete hire lie and reste take.

So she slepte til afternoon
That undertide was al ydoon.\(^o\)
\(\text{passed}\)
But as soone as she gan wake
She cried and loothly bere\(^o\) gan make:
\(\text{outcry}\)
She frotte\(^o\) hir hondes and hir feet
\(\text{tore at}\)
And cracched\(^o\) hir visage—it bledde weet;\(^o\)
\(\text{scratched} / \text{wet}\)
Hir riche robe she al torit,
\(\text{tears apart}\)
And was ravised\(^o\) out of her wit.
The two maidenes hire biside
Ne durste with hire no leng\(^o\) abide,
\(\text{longer}\)
But runne to the palais right
And tolde bothe squier and knight
That hir queene awede\(^o\) wolde,
\(\text{go mad}\)
And bad hem go and hire atholde.\(^o\)
\(\text{restrain}\)
Knightes runne and ladies also,
Damiseles sixty and mo,\(^o\)
\(\text{more}\)
In th' orchard to the queene they come,
And hire up in armes nome,\(^o\) took
And broughte hire to bed at laste,
And heeld hire there fine\(^o\) faste.\(^v\)

But evere she heeld\(^o\) in oo\(^o\) cry,
And wolde uppe\(^o\) and awy.\(^o\)

Whan the king herde that tiding
Nevere him nas worse for no thing:
Orfeo cam with knightes tene\(^o\)
To chambre right bifore the queene,
And looked and saide with greet\(^o\) pitee,
“O leve\(^o\) lif, what aileth thee?—
That evere yit hast been so sille,
And now thou gredest\(^o\) wonder shille.\(^o\)

Thy body that was so wht ycore\(^o\)
With thine nailes is all totore.\(^o\)
Allas, thy rode\(^o\) that was so reed\(^o\)
Is as wan as thou were deed.\(^o\)

And also thy fingres smale

been al bloody and al pale.
Allas, thy lovesome yên two

Looketh so\(^o\) man dooth on his fo.
A, dame, ich\(^o\) biseeche mercy—
Lete been al this reweful\(^o\) cry,
And tel me what\(^o\) thee is and how,
And what thing may thee helpe now.”

Tho\(^o\) lay she stille at the laste,
And gan to weepe swithe\(^o\) faste,
And saide thus the king unto:
“Allas, my lord Sir Orfeo,
Sitthen\(^o\) we first togider were
Ones wrothe\(^o\) nevere we nere,
But evere ich have yloved thee
As my lif, and so thou me.

But nowe we mote\(^o\) deele\(^o\) atwo—
Do thy best, for I moot\(^o\) go.”

“Allas,” quath he, “forlorn ich am!
Whider wilt thou go and to wham?\(^o\)
Whider thou goost ich wil with thee,
And whider I go thou shalt with me.”

“Nay, nay, sire, that nought nis.\(^o\)
Ich wil thee telle al how it is:
As ich lay this undertide\(^o\)
And slepte under oure orchard-side,
Ther come to me two faire knightes,
Wel y-armed al to rightes,
And bad me comen on hying\(^o\)
And speke with hir lord the king;
And ich answerede at\(^o\) wordes bolde

That I ne durste nought ne I nolde.\(^o\)
They prikked again as they mighte drive.\(^o\)
Tho\(^o\) cam hir king also blive\(^o\)

4. I.e., that’s no use.
5. I.e., they rode as fast as they could.
No one knew what had become of her.

With an hundred knightes and mo,
And damiseles an hundred also,
Alle on snow-white steedes;
As white as milk were hir weeds:
I ne seigh nevere yit bifore
So faire creatures ycore:
The king hadde a crown on his heed:
It nas of silver n’of gold reed,
But it was of a precious stoon;
As brighte as the sonne it shoon.
And as soone as he to me cam,
Wolde ich, nolde ich, he me nam
And made me with him to ride
Upon a palfrey him biside,
And broughte me to his palais
Wel attired in eech a ways,
And shewed me castels and towrs,
Riveres, foreestes, frith with flowres,
And his riche steedes eechoon,
And sitthen broughte me again hoom
Into oure owene orche-yard,
And saide to me thus afterward,
’Looke tomorwe that thou be
Right here under this impe-tree,
And thanne thou shalt with us go,
And live with us everemo.
And if thou makest us ylet,
Where thou be, thou worst yfet.
And al totore thy limes al
That no thing thee helpe shal.
And though thou beest so totorn,
Yit thou worst with us yborn."
When king Orfeo herde this cas,
“O, weel” quath he, “allas, allas!
Lever me were to lete my lif
Than thus to lese the queene my wif.”
He asked conseil at eech a man,
But no man him helpe can.
Amorwe the undertide is come,
And Orfeo hath his armes ynome,
And wel ten hundred knightes with him,
Eech y-armed, stout and grim.
And with the queene wenten he
Right unto that impe-tree.
They made sheltrom in eech a side,
And saide they wolde ther abide
And die there everychoon,
Er the queene sholde from hem goon.
And yit amiddes hem full right
The queene was away ytwise,
With faı¨rye forth ynome:
Men wiste nevere wher she was become.
And made such lamentation and such complaint.

White and gray fur; i.e., royal ermine.

Therto was crying, weep and wo; then
The king into his chambre is go
And ofte swooned upon the stoon, floor
And made swich dool and swich moon
That nye his lif was yspent—nearly / finished

Ther was noon amendement. remedy
He clepte togider his barouns, called
eerles, lوردes of renouns, great names
And when they alle ycomen were, “Lordinges,” he saide, “bifor you here
Ich ordaine myn heigh steward
To wite my kingdom afterward;
To keepe my londes overal. everywhere
For now I have my queene ylore, lost
The faireste lady that evere was borne, born
Nevere eft I nil no womman see;
In wildernesse now wil ich teo
And live ther for everemore,
With wilde beestes in holtes hore. woods / gray
And when ye wite that I bee spent, go
Make you than a parlement
And chese you a newe king: choose / for yourselves
Now dooth youre best with al my thing.” then
Tho was ther weeping in the halle,
And greet cry among hem alle; great
Unnethe mighte olde or yong scarcely
For weeping speke a word with tonge.
They kneeled alle adown in fere together
And prayede him if his wille were,
That he ne sholde from hem go.
“Do way,” quath he, “it shal be so.”
Al his kingdom he forsook;
But a sclavin on him he took: only / pilgrim’s cloak
He hadde no kirtel ne noon hood, short coat
Shert ne yit noon other good.
But his harp he took algate, at any rate
And dide him barefoot out at yate: gate
No man moste with him go.
O way, what ther was weep and wo,
alas / how
Whan he that hadde been king with crown
Wente so poorelich out of town.
Thruh the wode and over heeth wood
Into the wildernesse he geeth. goes
Nothing he fint that him is aise,
But evere he liveth in greet malaise.
He that hadde wered the fowe and gris,
And on bed the purper bis,
Now on harde heeth he lith, lies
With leves and grasse he him writh.
Sir Orfeo / 7

245 He that hadde had castels and towres,
Rivere foreest, frith\(^9\) with flowres,
Now though it ginne snowe and freese,
This king moot\(^o\) make his bed in meese.\(^o\)
He that hadde had knightes of pris,\(^o\)

250 Before him kneeling and ladis,
Now seeth he nothing that him liketh,\(^o\)
But wilde wormes\(^o\) by him striketh.\(^o\)
He that hadde yhad plente\(e\)e
Of mete and drinke, of eech daintee,

255 Now may he alday\(^o\) digge and wrote\(^o\)
Er he finde his fille of roote.
In somer he liveth by wilde fruit
And berien\(^o\) but goode lite;\(^9\)
In winter may he nothing finde

260 But roote, grasses, and the rinde.\(^o\)
Al his body away was dwined\(^o\)
For misaise, and al tochined.\(^o\)
Lord, who may telle of the sore
This king suffered ten yeer and more?

265 His heer of his beerd, blak and rowe,\(^o\)
To his girdel-stede\(^o\) was growe.
His harp wheron was al his glee
He hidde in an holwe tree,
And whan the weder was cleer and bright,

270 He took his harp to him wel right,
And harped at his owene wille;\(^o\)
In al the woode the soun gan shille;\(^o\)
That wilde beestes that ther beeth
For joy abouten him they teeth;\(^o\)

275 And alle the fowles that ther were
Come and sete on eech a brere\(^o\)
To here his harping afine,
So muche melodye was therine.
When he his harping lete\(^o\) wolde,

280 No beest by him abide nolde.
Ofte he mighte see him besides
In the hote undertides\(^o\)
The king of fairy with his route\(^o\)
Come to hunte him al aboute

285 With dinne, cry, and with blowing,
And houndes also with him berking.
But no beeste they ne nome\(^o\)
Ne nevere he niste wher they bicome.\(^1\)
And otherwhile he mighte see,

290 As a greet oost\(^o\) by him tee.\(^o\)
Wel atourned\(^o\) ten hundred knightes,
Eech y-armed to his rightes,\(^o\)
Of countenance stout and fiers,\(^o\)
With manye displayed\(^o\) baners,

295 And eech his swerd ydrawe holde,
But neve he niste\textdegree\, wher they wolde, knew not
And somwhile he seigh\textdegree\, other thing: saw
Knightes and ladies come dauncing, elegant / wonderfully
In quainte\textdegree\, attir, degisely,\textdegree\. step
Quainte pas\textdegree\ and softely.
Tabours\textdegree\ and trumpes yede\textdegree\ him by, drums / went
And al manere minstracy.\textdegree\. minstrelsy
And on a day he seigh\textdegree\, biside
Sixty ladies on horse ride,

Gentil and jolif\textdegree\ as brid\textdegree\ on ris\textdegree\— pretty / bird / bough
Nought oo man amonghes hem nis.
And eech a faucon on hond beer,\textdegree\ bore
And ridden on hawking by river.
Of game they founde wel good haunt,\textdegree\ plenty
Maulardes,\textdegree hairoun,\textdegree and corneraunt. mallards / herons
The fowles of\textdegree\ the water ariseth; from
The faucons hem wel deviseth:\textdegree\ descry
Eech faucon his preye slough.\textdegree\ slew
That seigh\textdegree\ Orfeo and lough: saw / laughed

"Parfay!\textdegree" quath he, "ther is fair game! by faith
Thider ich wil,\textdegree by Goddes name. will go
Ich was ywon swich\textdegree werk to see."
accustomed / such
He aroos and thider gan tee.\textdegree\ draw
To a lady he was ycome, understood
Biheeld, and hath wel undernome,\textdegree\ understood
And seeth by al thing that it is
His owene queene Dame Heurodis, eagerly / also
Yerne biheeld hire and she him eke,\textdegree\
But neither to other a word ne speke.

For misaise that she on him seigh\textdegree\ saw
That hadde been so riche and heigh,
The teres felle out of hir ye\textdegree. Die now after this sighte.
The othere ladies this ysye\textdegree\ saw
And maked hire away to ride:

She moste\textdegree\ with him no lenger\textdegree\ abide. must / longer
"Allas," quath he, "now me is wo. Why nil\textdegree deeth now me nought slo?\textdegree\ will not / slay
Allas, wrecche,\textdegree that I ne mighte wretched one
Die now after this sighte.

Allas, too longe last\textdegree\ my lif lasts
Whan I ne dar nought to my wif—
Ne she to me—oo word ne speke.
Allas, why nil myn herte breke?
Parfay,\textdegree quath he, "tide what bitide, by faith
Whider so thise ladies ride
The selve\textdegree waye ich wil strecke:\textdegree same / go
Of lif ne deeth me nothing recche.\textdegree care
His sclavin\textdegree he dide on also spak\textdegree cloak / at once
And heeng\textdegree his harp upon his bak,
hung
And hadde wel good wil to goon:
He ne spared neither stub ne soon.\textdegree

\textdegree\ I.e., neither stump nor stone prevented him.
In at a roche the ladies rideth
And he after and nought abideth.

Whan he was in the roche ago

350 Wel three mile other or mo,
He cam into a fair coutry, 
As bright so sonne on somers day,
Smoone and plain and alle greene:
Hil ne dale nas ther noon scene.

355 Amidde the lond a castel he seigh, 
Riche and real and wonder heigh.
Al the utemoste wal
Was cleer and shined as crystal.
An hundred towres ther were aboute,

360 Degiseliche, and batailed stout.
The butres cam out of the diche
Of reed gold y-arched riche.4
The vousour was anourned al
Of eech manere divers aumal.6

365 Within ther were wide wones, 
And alle were fulle of precious stones.
The worste pilar on to biholde
Al it was of burnist golde.
Al that lond was evere light,

370 For when it sholde be therk and night
The riche stones lighte gonne5
As brighte as dooth at noon the sonne.
No man may telle ne thinke in thought
The riche werk that ther was wrought.

375 By alle thing him thinkth it is
The proude court of Paradis.

In this castel the ladies alighte:
He wolde in after, if he mighte.
Orfeo knokketh at the yate:8

380 The porter was redy therate
And asked what he wolde have ydo.6
"Parfay, ich am a minstrel, lo,
To solace thy lord with my glee
If his sweete wille be."

385 The porter undide the gate anoon
And lete him into the castel goon.

390 And seigh, lying within the wal,
Of folk that ther were thider ybrought,
And thoughte dede, and nere nought:7
Some stooed withouten hade,8
And some none armes hade,
And some thurgh the body hadde wounde,
And some laye woode ybounde;  

395 And some armed on horse sete,
And some austral by they ete,
And some were in watre adreint,\(^\circ\)
drowned
And some with fire al forshreint,\(^\circ\)
shriveled
Wives ther laye on child-bedde,

Some dede and some awedde.\(^\circ\)
driven mad
And wonder fele\(^\circ\) ther laye besides
many
Right as they slepte hir undertides.\(^\circ\)
forenoons
Each was thus in this world ynome,
taken
With\(^\circ\) fairy thider ycome.
by force of

Ther he seigh his owene wif,
dear
Dame Heurodis, his leve\(^\circ\) lif,

Sleepe under an imp-tree:

By hir clothes he knew it was she.

When he hadde seen thise mervales alle

He wente into the kinges halle.

Than seigh he ther a seemly sighte:
A tabernacle\(^8\) wel ydight—
arrayed
Hir maister king therinne sete,
And hir queene fair and sweete.

Hir crownes, hir clothes shoon so brighte
That unnethe\(^\circ\) he biholde hem mighte.
with difficulty

When he hadde seen al this thing,
He kneeled adoun bifor the king:

“O lord,” he saide, “if thy wil were,
My minstracye thou sholdest yheere.”\(^9\)
hear

The king answerede, “What man art thou
That art hider ycomen now?
Ich, ne noon that is with me,
Ne sente never after thee.

Sith\(^\circ\) that ich here regne\(^\circ\) gan
since / reign
I ne foon\(^\circ\) nevere so hardy man
found
That hider to us durste wende
But\(^\circ\) that ich him wolde ofsende.”\(^9\)
unless / send for

“Lord,” quath he, “ye trowe\(^\circ\) wel
may believe

I nam but a poore minstrel,
And, sire, it is the maner of us
To seeche many a lordes hous.

And theigh\(^\circ\) we not welcome be,
though
Yit we mote\(^\circ\) profere forth oure glee.”\(^9\)

Bifor the king he sat adown
And took his harp so merye of soun,
tunes
And tempreth\(^\circ\) it as he wel can.

And blisful notes he ther gan
That alle that in the palais were

Come to him for to heere,

And lieth adown to his feete,
sits
Hem thinkth his melolye so sweete.
The king herkneth and sit\(^\circ\) ful stille:

To heere his glee he hath good wille.

Good bourde\(^\circ\) he hadde of his glee:
entertainment
The riche queene also hadde she.

8. I.e., an alcove.
When he hadde stint of his harping, ceased
Then saide to him the riche king,
“Minstrel, me liketh wel thy glee.
Now aske of me what it may be—
Largeliche ich wil thee paye generously
Now spoke and thou might it assaye.”
“Sire,” he saide, “ich praye thee
That thou woldest give me
The eeche lady, bright on blee,
That sleepe under the impe-tree.”
“Nay,” quath the king, “that nought nere:
A sory couple of you it were;
For thou art lene, rowe, and blak, lean / rough
And she is lovesom, withoute lak.
A loothly tiling it were forthy
To seen hire in thy compaigny.”
“O sire,” he saide, “gentil king,
Yit were it a wel fouler thing
To heere a lesing of thy mouthe.
So, sire, as ye saide nouthe
What ich wolde aske, have I wolde,
A kinges word moot needes be holde.”
“Thou sayest sooth,” the king saide than,
And sith I am a trewe man,
I wol wel that it be so:
Taak hire by the hond and go.
Of hire ich wol that thou be blithe.”
He kneeled adown and thanked him swithe;
His wif he took by the hond
And dide him swithe out of that lond,
Right as he cam the way he yede.
So longe he hath the way ynome
To Winchester he is ycome,
That somtime was his owene citee,
But no man knew that it was he.
No forther than the townes ende
For knoweleche he durste wende.
But in a beggeres bild ful narwe
Ther he hath take his herbarwe (To him and to his owene wife),
As a minstrel of poore lif,
And asked tidinges of that lond,
And who the kingdom heeld in hond.
The poore begger in his cote
tolde him everich  a grote —
How hir queene was stole awy,
Ten yeer goon, with fairy.
And now hir king in exile yede
But no man wiste in which thede;
And how the steward the lond gan holde,
And othere many thinges him tolde.
Amorwe ayain the noon-tide²

500 He maked his wif ther abide,
And beggeres clothes he borwed anoon,
And heeng² his harp his rigge² upon,
And wente him into that citee,
That men mighte him biholde and see.

505 Bothe eerles and barouns bolde,
Burgais² and ladies him gan biholde:
"Lord," they saide, "swich a man!
How longe the heer² him hangeth upon!
Lo, how his beerd hangeth to his knee!

510 He is yclungen² also² a tree!"
And as he yede in the streete,
With his steward he gan meete.
"Sir steward," he saide, "grant mercy!
Ich am an harpour of hethenesse:
Help me now in this distresse."
The steward saide, "Com with me, com:
Of that I have thou shalt have som.
Eech harpour is welcome me to
520 For my lordes love, Sir Orfeo."
Anoon they wente into the halle,
The steward and the lordes alle.
The steward wessh² and wente to mete,
And manye lordes by him sete.

525 Ther were trumpours² and tabourers,²
Harpours fele,² and crouders:²
Muche melodye they maked alle.
And Orfeo sat stille in halle.
And herkneth; whan they been al stille,
He took his harp and tempered² shille² —
The blisfullest notes he harped there
That evere man yherde with ere.
Eech man liked wel his glee.

530 The steward looked and gan ysee,
And the harp knew also blive.²
"Minstrel," he saide, "so mote² thou thrive,
Where haddest thou this harp and how?
I praye that thou me telle now."
"Lord," quath he, "in uncouthe thede,²
Thurgh a foreest as I yede,²
I foond² lying in a dale
A man with² lions totorn² smale,
And wolves him frette² with teeth so sharp.
By him I foond this eech² harp
540 Wel ten yeer it is ago."
"O," quath the steward, "now me is wo!
That was my lord Sir Orfeo.
Allas, wrecche, what shal I do

2. In the morning toward noontime.
That have swich\textdegree a lord ylore?\textdegree
That him was so harde grace y-yarked,\textdegree
And so vile deeth ymarked,\textdegree
Adown he fel aswoone to grounde.
His barouns him tooke up that stounde\textdegree
And telleth him how that it geeth: \textdegree
It is no boote\textdegree of mannes deeth.
King Orfeo knew wel by than\textdegree
His steward was a trewe man
And loved him as him oughte to do,
And stondeth up and saith thus, “Lo,
Steward, herkne now this thing:
If ich were Orfeo the king
And hadde ysuffered ful yore\textdegree
In wildernes muche sore,
And hadde ywonne my queene awy\textdegree
Out of the lond of fa\textdegree airy,
And hadde ybrought the lady hende\textdegree
Right here to the townes ende,
And with a begger hir in\textdegree ynome,\textdegree
And were myselve hider ycome
Poorelich to thee thus stille,
For to assaye\textdegree thy goode wille,
And ich founde thee thus trewe,
Thou ne sholdest it nevere rewe:
Sikerliche, for love or ay,\textdegree
Thou sholdest be king after my day.
If thou of my deeth haddest been blithe,
Thou sholdest have voided\textdegree also swithe.”
Tho\textdegree alle tho\textdegree that therinne sete
That is was Orfeo underyete,\textdegree
And the steward wel him knew:
Over and over the boord\textdegree he threw
And fel adown to his feete.
So dide eech lord that ther sete,
And alle they saide at oo\textdegree crying,
“Ye beeth oure lord, sire, and oure king.”
Glade they were of his live:
To chambre they ladde him as blive,\textdegree
And bathed him and shaved his beard,
And tired\textdegree him as a king apert,\textdegree
And sith\textdegree with greet processioun
They broughte the queene into the town,
With alle manere minstracye.
Lord, ther was greet melodye:
For joye they wepte with hir ye
That hem so sound\textdegree ycomen sye.\textdegree
Now Orfeo neve corouned\textdegree is,
And his queene Dame Heurodis,
And lived longe afterward,
And sitthen\textdegree king was the steward.
Harpours in Britain after than\textdegree
Herde how this merveile bigan
And made a lay of good liking, well-pleasing
And nempned it after the king. named
That lay is “Orfeo” yhote. called
Good is the lay, sweete is the note.
Thus cam Sir Orfeo out of his care:
God grante us alle wel to fare.