This poem was composed in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century in the South Midlands, perhaps in London. The text below is based in part on the Auchenleck manuscript, which was copied between 1330 and 1340. Those of you who are familiar with Ovid's *Metamorphoses* may recognize the origin of the story in classical mythology. But here the story as been recast as a Celtic tale of the otherworld.

We redeþ oft and findeþ y-write,  
And þis clerkes wele it wite,  
Layes þat ben in harping  
Ben y-founde of ferli þing:  
5) Sum beþe of wer and sum of wo,  
And sum of joie and mirþe also,  
And sum of trecherie and of gile,  
Of old aventours þat fel while;  
And sum of bourses and ribaudy,  
10) And mani þer beþ of fairý.  
Of al þinges þat men seþ,  
Mest o love, forþþeþ, þey beþ.  
In Breteyne þis layes were wrought,  
First y-founde and forþ y-brought,  
15) Of aventours þat fel bi dayes,  
Wherof Bretouns maked her layes.  
When kinges might our y-here  
Of ani mervailes þat þer were,  
Pai token an harp in gle and game  
20) And maked a lay and gaf it name.  
Now of þis adventours þat weren y-falle  
Y can tel sum, ac nought alle.  
Ac herkneþ, lordinges þat ben trewe,  
Ichil you telle of "Sir Orfewe."  
25) Orfeo mest of ani þing  
Lovede þe gle of harping.  
Siker was everi gode harpour  
Of him to have miche honour.  
Himself he lerned forto harp,  
30) And leyd þeron his wittes scharp;  
He lerned so þer noþing was  
A better harpour in no plas.  
In al þe warld was no man bore  
Þat ones Orfeo sat before -  
35) And he might of his harping here -  
Bot he schuld þenche þat he were  
In on of þe joies of Paradis,
Swiche melody in his harping is.
Orfeo was a king,
40) In Ingland an heighe lording,
A stalworþ man and hardi bo;
Large and curteys he was also.
His fader was comen of King Pluto,
And his moder of King Juno,
45) Pat sum time were as godes yhold
For aventours þat þai dede and told.
Þis king sojournþ in Traciens,
Pat was a cité of noble defens -
For Winchester was cleped þo
50) Traciens, wiþouten no.
Þe king hadde a quen of priis
Pat was y-cleped Dame Heurodis,
Þe fairest levedi, for þe nones,
Pat might gon on bodi and bones,
55) Ful of love and godenisse -
Ac no man may telle hir fairnise.
Bifel so in þe comessing of May
When miri and hot is þe day,
And oway beþ winter schours,
60) And everi feld is ful of flours,
And blosme breme on everi bough
Over al wexeþ miri anough,
Þis ich quen, Dame Heurodis
Tok to maidens of priis,
65) And went in an undrentide
To play bi an orchardside,
To se þe floures sprede and spring
And to here þe foules sing.
Pai sett hem doun al þre
70) Under a fair ympe-tre,
And wel sone þis fair quene
Fel on slepe opon þe grene.