Hierarchical Modes of Love in Chaucer's 'The Parliament of Fowls'.

Emil A. Mucchetti
Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/2154

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
INFORMATION TO USERS

This dissertation was produced from a microfilm copy of the original document. While the most advanced technological means to photograph and reproduce this document have been used, the quality is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original submitted.

The following explanation of techniques is provided to help you understand markings or patterns which may appear on this reproduction.

1. The sign or "target" for pages apparently lacking from the document photographed is "Missing Page(s)". If it was possible to obtain the missing page(s) or section, they are spliced into the film along with adjacent pages. This may have necessitated cutting thru an image and duplicating adjacent pages to insure you complete continuity.

2. When an image on the film is obliterated with a large round black mark, it is an indication that the photographer suspected that the copy may have moved during exposure and thus cause a blurred image. You will find a good image of the page in the adjacent frame.

3. When a map, drawing or chart, etc., was part of the material being photographed the photographer followed a definite method in "sectioning" the material. It is customary to begin photoing at the upper left hand corner of a large sheet and to continue photoing from left to right in equal sections with a small overlap. If necessary, sectioning is continued again — beginning below the first row and continuing on until complete.

4. The majority of users indicate that the textual content is of greatest value, however, a somewhat higher quality reproduction could be made from "photographs" if essential to the understanding of the dissertation. Silver prints of "photographs" may be ordered at additional charge by writing the Order Department, giving the catalog number, title, author and specific pages you wish reproduced.

University Microfilms
300 North Zeeb Road
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48106
A Xerox Education Company
MUCCHETTI, Emil A., 1938-
HIERARCHICAL MODES OF LOVE IN CHAUCER'S
THE PARLIAMENT OF FOWLS.

The Louisiana State University and Agricultural
and Mechanical College, Ph.D., 1971
Language and Literature, general

University Microfilms, A XEROX Company, Ann Arbor, Michigan

© 1972

EMIL A. MUCCHETTI

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.
Hierarchical Modes of Love in Chaucer's
The Parliament of Fowls

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

Emil A. Mucchetti
B.A., Villanova University, 1961
M.A., University of Texas at El Paso, 1965
December, 1971
PLEASE NOTE:

Some pages may have
indistinct print.
Filmed as received.

University Microfilms, A Xerox Education Company
ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I wish to recognize and to thank Professor Thomas A. Kirby for the patient guidance and generous assistance which he so liberally gave in directing my dissertation. I likewise am indebted to Professors Nicolai von Kreisler and Lawrence A. Sasek for proposing ways of development and for editing it. I should also like to acknowledge Professors James T. Nardin and William W. Evans for their corrections and criticisms.

Lastly, I wish to thank my wife for her unstinting dedication to the dissertation.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENT ........................................ ii

ABSTRACT ................................................ iv

CHAPTER I
Hierarchical Modes of Thought in the Fourteenth Century ........................................ 1

CHAPTER II
Scipio and Common Profit ........................................ 35

CHAPTER III
The Garden of Love ................................................ 86

CHAPTER IV
The Goddess Nature ................................................ 122

CHAPTER V
The Great Debate ................................................ 150

CONCLUSION ..................................................... 187

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................ 197

VITA ............................................................. 205
ABSTRACT

While many commentators acknowledge the freshness and universality of Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Parliament of Fowls*, some have been dissatisfied with its unity and have regarded it as a precious trifle. This shortsightedness seems especially odd in view of the emphasis the age of Chaucer placed on order and degree. What at first appears as irrational and disunified is highly organized when the hierarchical levels of love, derived by extension of the Great Chain of Being, are applied as the principle of structural unity. The use Chaucer makes of this hierarchy must not be conceived as a rejection of the lower gradations of love but should be viewed as a means by which man can make a positive step-by-step progression to Love Himself. The direction of love, whether its basic orientation is toward self or others, is the criterion for judging its efficacy.

The questioning of love's nature begins in the open-
ing sententia and is expanded in the Somnium section (ll. 15-169) to deal with the love signified by common profit, a form of amor rationalis. Although this study concentrates on the poem's underlying vein of philosophic-religious seriousness, it is not a disaffirmation of its humorous motif, which is visible in Chaucer's introduction of the subject of common profit, the highest level of earthly love, through a comic portrayal of Scipio Africanus. The poet may want to soften the harshness of Africanus' directive to seek immortality, but he agrees that the reality of love is judged by its power to help man escape from imprisonment within himself. Beneath the comic guise of Chaucer's bungling fictional narrator lies his own imperfect human nature which enables him to see the world in humorous perspective and to empathize with his characters and his audience.

In the next section the spectrum of love widens to include love according to nature (ll. 170-210) and the self-indulgent love associated with Venus (ll. 211-94). The well-ordered Garden of Love typifies the peace and delight that can be characteristic of man's nature if he orders it by maintaining the delicate balance between his animal and rational parts. In a poem replete with light
imagery, Chaucer suggests the barrenness of sensual love by setting Venus, its sponsor, at the nadir of a beam of light emanating from God.

The parliament of birds, monitored by the goddess Nature, fills out the last major section (ll. 295-692). Her primary chore is to keep wayward man on a steady moral course. Because of her keen evaluation of human action and motivation, she is particularly suited to direct the activities of the assembly. The fact that Nature fails to accuse the fowls of immorality indicates their commitment to love is in some sense positive. The love the three tercels profess for the formel, though expressed in the language of courtly love, illustrates genuine concern for another. The love evinced by the lower classes also participates in *amor rationalis* in that their solutions are in the interest of the common good. However, the failure of each social class to understand the viewpoint of the others is the biggest hurdle to a common accord. By exploiting the comic possibilities of human situations and characters, Chaucer produces a poem which is a careful balance of philosophy and humor.
Chapter I. Hierarchical Modes of Thought in the Fourteenth Century

The history of Geoffrey Chaucer's age is not the record of a healthy, carefree nation suggested by the picture of the pilgrims on the Canterbury pilgrimage. Not only the decay of institutions and ideas that had governed medieval England characterized the age, but the whole feudal system was also in the throes of revolution. Despite the industrial, military, and social turmoil, fourteenth-century England was still conscious of its place in the divine schema. Its principal overriding convictions continued to be the belief that a harmonious order existed beneath the chaos of human experience, that the law of order traceable even in the lowest creatures insisted upon a higher and more rational ordinance permeating the universe, and that in spite of a general unrest the cosmos had unity and direction attributable to the primal Godhead.

Understandably then, in investigating and classify-
ing the disparate phenomena of their consciousness, Englishmen sought a scheme of creation complete in every detail. As a consequence they continued to affirm the plan and structure of the universe as a "Great Chain of Being," a natural hierarchy in the existence of things stretching from the meanest kind of entities, hardly specks of creation, through every possible grade of perfection until terminating in the absolutely Perfect Being. In the explanation of order, every species constituted a discrete link in this infinitesimal gradation, with each higher species not only transcending but also possessing the functions and faculties of the species beneath it. As each species, moreover, ascended the scale of being, it partook of greater unity, exercised a broader range of influence, and had a larger share of the infinite. In short, every higher species was more perfect as it participated more in God who thus became both the cause and final end of all being.\footnote{For an overview of the historical development of the concept of the Great Chain of Being, see Arthur O. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea (1933; rpt. Cambridge, Massachusetts: 1966), esp. pp. 3-66.}

Since Chaucer and his contemporaries knew their ultimate origin and destination, life was not mysterious.
Their vivid sense of hierarchy dictated that if they, as obscure images of the divine, were to accomplish the divine will and reach the summit of perfection, they must order their individual lives by turning away from the vain and the transitory. Only by unswerving devotion to personal moral order could virtue be inculcated and joy achieved. With the extension of this principle of order to society, the obligation to seek perfection came to have social as well as individual ramifications. To seek order in one's own life was to seek order in society, for the individual was a smaller part of the larger social structure. Thus as a member of the state man recognized that he also had a supernatural vocation. It followed logically that any disruption of order, whether individual or social, was viewed as evil and that the evildoer became a misuser of his will either by not striving for unity with God or by not participating to the fullest in the attainment of the common good. Because man had his place in the whole scheme of creation, individual and social abuses could not alter the ideal order and hierarchy which were ultimately based on God Himself.

The foregoing generalizations indicate to some extent that the concept of the Great Chain of Being was by no means a simple cosmological picture. To grasp more fully
the prevalence of fourteenth-century hierarchisms, we have only to glance at the General Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* and the wonderful gallery of "sondry folk" who testify to the establishment of a well-defined social hierarchy or to read the *Knight's Tale* and Theseus' final address to Palamon and Emily, which confirms the existence of a "faire cheyne of love" ordering the universe. The point is that whether consciously or not, hierarchical modes of thought furnished the basic patterns for organizing experience and for suffusing daily conflicts, problems, and values with meaning. By forcing a system of thought to relate to action and experience, Chaucer's contemporaries were able to simplify the complexities and paradoxes of life. Thus after Arcite's death, when explaining the significance of the chain of love, Theseus could counsel "parfit joye," and the readers would immediately understand him because the identification of order in apparent fortuitousness had become an integral part of their culture, a part of cultural thought reflected not only in the vicissitudes of daily life but also in their burgeoning literature. Geoffrey Chaucer was the greatest English poet of the age, and to his poetry

---

*I (A) 2987-3015. All citations and quotations are from F. N. Robinson, ed. The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1957).*
we shall turn our attention to see how it reflects these concepts.

In order to read Chaucer's poems with maximum understanding and full appreciation of his poetic genius, we need to know many "unliterary" aspects of fourteenth-century culture, but none is more important than the principle of hierarchical ordering. The value of this principle, it will be shown, lies in providing a system of structural unity by which we can progress with greater comprehension from the beginning to the end of Chaucer's *The Parliament of Fowls*. Although traditional scholarship has heeded the structure of Chaucer's poems, it frequently has divorced structure from meaning and has failed to integrate structural design with character, action, and event, and as a result structure has become isolated from the unfolding dramatic progress. I am not objecting to the achievements of Chaucerian research and criticism, but this shortsightedness seems especially odd in view of the great emphasis Chaucer's age placed on order and degree. What may at first appear as irrational and disunified may be highly organized when hierarchisms, derived by extension of the Great Chain of Being, are applied as the principle of structural unity.

Since it is my purpose to point out how Chaucer used
this principle to unify and to give greater perspective to the Parliament, it is essential to show initially that Chaucer has a direct, not necessarily a complete knowledge of the concept of the Great Chain of Being. Except for a few remarks relating to its origin, no attempt will be made to trace the development of the scale of being from its incipience in Plato's *Timaeus* through the Middle Ages. Many of the philosophical problems this development involves are outside the scope and intention of the present inquiry, which seeks to determine the specific relationship between hierarchical construction and the Parliament rather than to assess the value of the hierarchies.

The concept of the Great Chain of Being had its earliest enunciation in Plato's *Timaeus* as the theory of Forms, but, because of the breakup of the Roman Empire and the gradual separation of its Eastern and Western halves, there was no direct knowledge of Plato's works until the end of the Middle Ages. In spite of this loss, the Neoplatonists, often called the most powerful minds of antiquity, spread and redefined the scale of being. One of the most important and widely popular sources of Neoplatonism in Western Europe during the Middle Ages was Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, an exposition known for its accuracy and clarity. As William H.
Stahl points out in his introduction to Macrobius' *Commentary*, most Englishmen are familiar with the *Commentary* through Chaucer's many citations of the treatise, especially in the *Parliament of Fowls* where he referred to it as the "olde bok toturn" which he enjoyed "the longe day ful faste . . . yerne." Of Chaucer's familiarity with the *Commentary* there is no doubt, but the extent of his reading has been seriously questioned. Even though E. P. Anderson's arguments for Chaucer's thorough knowledge of the *Commentary* are generally inconclusive, his strongest point is reference to Chaucer's scholarly habits of mind and to his encyclopedic reading, facts which could


4 The questioning arose as a result of Chaucer's apparent confusion about the authorship of Scipio's *Dream*. For instance, in the early lines of the *Romaunt of the Rose*, Chaucer refers to Macrobius as the author of the dream and calls Scipio "king Cipioun." However in the *Parliament of Fowls*, Chaucer correctly identifies Cicero as the author of the *Dream* and Macrobius as the writer of the *Commentary*, a development which led Martha Shackford in "The Date of Chaucer's *Hous of Fame*," *Modern Language Notes*, 31 (1916), 507-8, to propose a chronological solution to the difficulty. More recently her argument was amplified by Robert A. Pratt in "Chaucer Borrowing from Himself," *Modern Language Quarterly*, 7 (1946), 264. For a more complete discussion of this matter, see William H. Stahl, trans. Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* (New York, 1952), pp. 52-55. All quotations are from Stahl's translation, hereafter cited as *Commentary*. 
indicate that his reading of Macrobius was complete. 5

Again, in summarizing Chaucer's dependence on Macrobius, Stahl concludes by saying that "it seems probable that Chaucer read all or most of the Commentary, but to prove it would be extremely difficult, if it is at all possible." 6 Since there is a persuasive assumption for Chaucer's familiarity with Macrobius, let us turn to an examination of the Commentary.

Six chapters (I.ix-xiv), on the origin and descent of souls, constitute the quintessence of Neoplatonism in Macrobius' Commentary, and of these six H. F. Stewart asserts that Chapter Fourteen contains "as good a summary of the Plotinian trinity as was possible in Latin." 7 Because this trinity of the One, the Mind, and the Soul is not only the essential statement of Neoplatonic cosmology but also the derivation of the hierarchical ordering of the universe and the explanation of the expansiveness and the transcendence of the One, which is identical with the


6Stahl, p. 55.

7"Thoughts and Ideas of the Period," The Cambridge Medieval History, I (Cambridge, 1911), 573.
Good in Plato's *Republic*, Book One, Chapter Fourteen of the *Commentary* must be studied closely.

Macrobius is convinced that the universe is constructed on the Plotinian principle of emanation. Accordingly, the ineffable One is the Creator and First Cause of all existents which either are or seem to be, so that all things have existence by reason of the ungrudging plenitude of the One who radiates and imparts being to lower creation. The first emanation of the bounteous outpouring of the One is the Mind or *Nous* which, as long as it fixes its gaze upon the One, enjoys complete identity with its Creator; but when the Mind looks at beings below, it creates from itself the Soul of the world. It is in the Mind, therefore, that multiplicity first appears since the ideas which are the prototypes of all created being and which compose the intelligible world have their origin in it. The Soul, the last member of the triad, forms the connecting link between the intelligible world and the sensual world. As long as the Soul contemplates the One, it continues to share the One's spirituality, but by looking downward and by diverting its attention towards the phenomenal world, the Soul becomes corrupted into bodies. Individual human souls are detachments of the World-Soul, and they, according to Macrobius, are subdivided into two
elements, pure reason (*logikon*), which springs from the Mind, and sense perception (*aisthetikon*) and growth (*phytikon*), which derive from the Soul's own nature. In this emanative process the material world forms the lowest stage of the universe. Although it is antithetical to the One, it is not complete privation since it is illumined by forms and enters into the composition of material objects. To sum up this first statement on the Plotinian trinity, the One is the true and transcendent God, the principle and source of all being while the Mind and the World-Soul are but its effects or creatures whose role as divine intermediaries is to form the nexus between the One and the material world and to explain the consequent descent from spirituality to materiality in an orderly manner.

In a later section of the same chapter, Macrobius summarizes this concept in a succinct passage, using the well-known metaphors of the chain and of a series of mirrors:

Accordingly, since Mind emanates from the Supreme God and Soul from Mind, and Mind, indeed, forms and suffuses all below with life, and since this is the one splendor lighting up everything and visible in all, like a countenance reflected in many mirrors arranged in a row, and since all

---

Commentary, I.xiv, 5-9, pp. 143-44.
follow on in continuous succession, degenerating step by step in their downward course, the close observer will find that from the Supreme God even to the bottommost dregs of the universe there is one tie, binding at every link and never broken. This is the golden chain of Homer which, he tells us, God ordered to hang down from the sky to the earth. (I.xiv, 15)

Macrobius conceives of the emanative process in a strictly Neoplatonic manner, as a radiation of light from an infinite source. As the beam of light descends and becomes less intense, it produces lower grades of being which, according to their distance from the primal light source, are more or less obscure images of the Supreme God. Between the positive pole of infinite light and the negative pole of unilluminated darkness, a plethora of beings exist linked together in a "golden chain" according to their degree of mirroring the One, which remains without any change or loss despite the diffusion of light. By analogy the principle of light also becomes the principle of Goodness and Beauty. The Good summons all beings by its beauty, and conversely, it is because of the Beautiful that all beings desire to be good. The resultant ladder of light is both an explanation of creation and a means of transcending to the goodness and beauty of the

9The analogy of light as the principle of goodness and beauty occurs often in Platonic philosophy, especially in Chapter VI (484C-511A) of The Republic.
One; the former is an outgoing by which God manifests Himself to creatures while the latter is a returning by which God inspires all creatures to seek Him as their ethical or aesthetic end. The world, then, is a theophany with each being realizing some infinitesimal portion of the divine immaterial principle, whether it is under the aspect of Goodness or Beauty.

So far we have focused our attention on the Supreme Being who indiscriminately imparts his divine radiance to "all creatures"; now let us recognize man's role in this hierarchical system. In his discussion of man, Macrobius follows the Plotinian hypothesis that each man is a creature of the One and that he is a composite of a sensible, corruptible body and of a rational, spiritual soul because of which he has precedence over lower creation as long as he does not permit the degeneracy of the body to enslave him. Man's chief concern, therefore, is to develop the soul at the expense of the body in order to attain blessedness and contemplation of the One. His first obligation is to know himself, for self-knowledge enables him to order his soul in the practice of good and to avoid the defilement of sensual pleasures, which represent gradations of disorder according to the degree of their enslavement. Habits of good, virtue, must be man's primary
objective in lifting himself to the divine. Following Cicero's guidance, Macrobius lists prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance as the key virtues, those with the greatest social value, by which man can leave the dross of the body behind. We should especially note that although Macrobius constantly refers to virtue and vice in the extremes of absolute goodness or badness, his conception of man's ability to perfect himself does admit of degrees. As an example, if one man were to practice two of the key virtues while another exercised all four, the second man would be more perfect than the first; the lesser evil is preferred to the greater, and the greater good has precedence over the lesser good. Consequently man, like all beings in the universe, is hierarchically ordered according to his state of perfection, whether that perfection is ethically or aesthetically oriented. This concept is found only implicitly in Macrobius' Commentary, but Boethius, another commentator on whom Chaucer relied heavily, explicitly acknowledges this hierarchy.

The readers of Chaucer need no introduction to "Boece" since they know Boethius through Chaucer's masterful translation of the Consolation of Philosophy and its subsequent

10 Commentary, I.viii-xiv.
influence on most of Chaucer's work, particularly on Troi-

lus and Criseyde and the Knight's Tale. Moreover, as H.

R. Patch states, Boethius is no casual influence on Chaucer:

He drew from nearly every part of the Consolatio
in a way that shows his complete mastery of it; he introduced its material not only in less sig-

nificant moments in his plots but at important
places where the philosophical meaning becomes
apparent. Thus he shows Boethian influence when
he writes about true nobility, moral responsibi-

lity, divine intervention in human affairs, the
really solemn problems of human life. 11

It is evident from Patch's statement that Boethius' aim
in the Consolation is more than to account for the in-

justices of which he is a victim. Chaucer is very much
aware, as some critics are not, 12 that Boethius is not
only dealing with the problems of free will and divine
foreknowledge but also with the different levels of good-

ness in man and of his happiness in the ultimate Good.
The fact is that the Consolation is also a treatise on
moral philosophy inciting man to the discovery and the
enjoyment of the most perfect object of his aspirations.

From Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy, Chaucer in-

11 The Tradition of Boethius (New York, 1935), pp. 70-

71.

12 Two critics who share this view are: Emile Brehier,
The History of Philosophy: The Middle Ages and the Renais-
sance, trans. Wade Baskin, III (Chicago, 1965), 7, and
Werner P. Friederich, Dante's Fame Abroad: 1350-1850
(Chapel Hill, 1950), p. 188.
herited a more simplified and more explicit hierarchical world picture, one free from the Neoplatonic theory of emanation. The Mind and the World-Soul were no longer divine intermediaries between the human soul and the Good, which Boethius terms "the governour of thinges," and as a result man could face God without mediating powers. Unlike Macrobius, who considered it necessary to state concisely the ladder of emanation, Boethius seems so awed by the universal order that he finds it unnecessary to argue its existence; however, as Chaucer's translation indicates, he repeatedly refers to the fact of divine ordering:

"Whoso it be that is cleer of vertu, sad and well ordynat of lyvyng, that hath put under fote the proude weerdes, and loketh, upright, upon either fortune, he may holden his chere undesconfited." (I, m4, 1-5)

"Ther nys no thyng unbounde from his olde lawe, ne forleteth the werk of his propre estat." (I, m.5, 28-30)

God tokneth and assigneth the tymes, ablynge hem to hir propre offices, ne he ne suffreth nat the stowndes whiche that hymself hath devyded and constreyned to be imedled togidre. And forthy he that forleteth certein ordenaunce of doynge by overthrowynge wey, he hath no glad issue or ende of his werkes. (I, m.6, 17-24)

". . . al that moeveth in any manere, taketh his causes, his ordre, and formes, of the stablenesse of the devyne thought." (IV, p.6, 44-47)

Boethius assumes that the order of things shows God as the
primary cause of a universe in which every species has its proper degree of being and that man is unique among creatures because he alone must duplicate the universal order within his soul by virtuously striving towards unity with the divine Orderer. The way to God is a step-by-step process such as Boethius makes in the Consolation with Lady Philosophy as his guide, but in man's case the Good directs his aspirations.

In the initial books of the Consolation, Boethius' complaint against riches, honor, power, and fame is not aimed at these pursuits as partial objectives of man's endeavor (and thus legitimate) but against these objectives when they usurp man's desire for the ultimate good. As ends in themselves these transitory goods are inadequate and disappointing because they are only limited means of happiness. Furthermore, in Book Three, Prose Ten, Lady Philosophy makes it clear that the highest good, which is man's perfect beatitude, is not merely added to all the other goods but is related to them as their crown, that the "sovereyn good [is] the somme and the cause of all that oughte ben desired." Her final observation is that "alle othere things" are only constituent parts of happiness and that accumulatively they do not constitute happiness. This remark has at least one important implication,
for the reason that riches, honor, power, and fame are true and noble is that they participate in Goodness itself. Consequently, in virtue of something absolutely good all things are good, which is another way of saying that a hierarchy of good orders man's life. The greater the good which he achieves, the greater is his participation and perfection in consummate goodness. That this hierarchy of good was generally recognized by the medieval mind is evinced in Anselm's famous ontological argument for God's existence and Thomas Aquinas' fourth proof for the existence of God, where both theologians argue the reverse form of Boethius' proposition, that is, from the varying levels of goodness to the highest Good. The *Consolation*, in actuality, is a plea for the pursuit of true happiness, a pursuit, it must be emphasized, which does not call for the renunciation of all earthly pleasures since riches, honor, power, and fame are good as long as they continue to be means to ultimate Goodness. Insofar as man embraces good by renouncing all sensible delights as terminal ends, he has wisdom. To achieve beatitude, therefore, man needs not only virtue, the good of the body, but also wisdom, the chief good of the soul, and pleasure, which is a good of both the body and the soul.
Boethius' conception of good naturally leads him to reflections on the unifying power of love, presented in three key passages of the *Consolation*: II, m.8; III, m.9; IV, m.6. In essence these passages state that God, being perfectly good and freely generous, created the universe from love, and from this love the universe receives its order and harmony. If the universe were not given its orderly arrangement through divine love, elemental nature would disrupt into primitive chaos and would not possess the slightest stability. Love, thus, binds the heavens in a beautiful concord, and its beneficence is clearly discernible in man:

This love halt togidres peple joyned with an holy boond, and knytteth sacrement of mariages of chaste loves; and love enditeth lawes to trew felawes. 0 weleful were mankynde, yif thilke love that governeth hevene governede yowr corages. (II, m.8, 21-26)

The closing words of this meter affirm that an overruling Providence orders the world of man as well as the world of nature according to a rational plan and also strongly suggest that the metaphysical structure of beings is based on a hierarchical principle of love, since each existent from the lowest to the highest has love both as its binding force and as its source of existence. In reality, love may be viewed as a chain linking the ephemeral universe of phenomena to the ideal universe of Love, and it
has special significance for man, who, borne on its divine current, is capable of returning to his infinite cause. In Boethius' *Consolation*, then, the One of Macrobius' Commentary has become identified with Good and Love, so that man can be envisioned as participating in God by acquiring greater degrees of goodness or of love. Finally, it must be pointed out that the Boethian "bond of love" has a direct and emphatic influence on Chaucer, as I shall demonstrate in detail in Chapter Three.

Before we leave the *Consolation* some comment on free will is in order because, as Boethius' remark at the conclusion of the meter just quoted indicates, man is at liberty to follow the way of love, which accounts for much of the world's disorder. In Book Five, dealing with the question whether God's foreknowledge obviates man's freedom of action, Boethius arrives at the answer that man can only find consolation in divine providence, whose will he must acquiesce in if he is to overcome the vicissitudes of fortune. In other words, man the lover must be directed and guided in his selection of loves by making his will identical with God's will. In the phrasing of Saint Augustine, man should love God and do what he himself wills. To will what God wills and to love what God loves are the greatest forms of individual liberty. On
the other hand, to will what the body urges for its own delight is the basest form of enslavement. Unlike other creatures, who love blindly, man's quest for God is conscious. In order to stop the incessant pursuit of every fugitive desire and to light the divine spark lying dormant within himself, man, quite paradoxically, must separate himself from his own will. When man seeks recompense or self-interest, love becomes a faulty mode of expression since the will operates to satisfy its own desires. True love discovers its reward in disinterestedness. For that reason man should avoid selfishness in his relationship with himself, with his neighbor, and with his God. To the extent that man detaches himself from self, he attaches himself to God. The conclusion is obvious that, born of love, man has the absolute necessity of practicing love according to God's will if he is to participate in infinite love.

But if the spiritual side of man presses on towards divine love as the goal of salvation, more belligerent is the insistency of his carnal side which refuses to disparage the flesh. Since medieval man could not deny concupiscent love, he sought both justification and satisfaction for it, not in covert hideaways, but in a widely promulgated system of chivalrous love, which is tradition-
ally thought of as originating at the court of Eleanor of Aquitaine in northern France during the eleventh century.  

These courtly rules of conduct, codified for Marie of Champagne by Andreas Capellanus in *De Arte Honeste Amandi*, governed the relationship between the sexes and directed that a man's love for a woman was to be an inspiration to higher values and ennobling deeds. Its fundamental tenets called for the total submission of the man to his beautiful lady and for a worshipful attitude elevating the lady to a place of adoration. According to A. J. Denomy these were only two of the three basic elements of the courtly

13 For detailed discussion of the code of courtly love, see Lewis F. Mott, *The System of Courtly Love Studied as an Introduction to the Vita Nuova of Dante* (Boston, 1896) in which he outlines the major characteristics of the code, and William A. Neilson, *The Origins and Sources of the Court of Love* (Boston, 1899) in which he studies the courtly love conventions in relation to the love-allegory of the fifteenth century. Neilson states that the courtly code has its origin in the reaction of the nobility against the ascetic ideals of the Church.

14 In recent years the entire concept of courtly love has been seriously questioned. D. W. Robertson, Jr., *A Preface to Chaucer* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1963), pp. 391-503 is probably the most important critic in this respect. Not only does he deny the existence of the courtly code at the court of Champagne, but he also contends that Andreas Capellanus' *De Amore* is an ironic attack on concupiscence and the courtly love system. However, Robertson's kind of revisionism has been criticized. In a sensible rebuttal Francis L. Utley, "Robertsonianism Redivivus," *Romance Philology*, 19 (1965), 250-60, maintains that Robertson provides little contemporary evidence to support his conclusions and that he neglects those writers who disagree with him.
code, for he would have a third: "the conception of love as ever unsatiated, ever increasing desire." In view of these principles, we find that carnal love becomes a hierarchy: the woman is exalted to a position of primacy; the man is relegated to a condition of obeisance, and the concupiscent desire shared by the lovers is the means of attainment.

Chaucer's familiarity with the courtly code and, hence, with this "sensual" hierarchy has been a well documented fact since W. G. Dodd presented his comprehensive study of the courtly love ideas in Chaucer's poetry and since C. S. Lewis showed Chaucer's awareness of the opposition between courtly love and religiously sanctioned love. More recently Father Denomy's book, the Heresy of Courtly Love, has provided a notable re-statement of the chief problems involved in investigating the origins of courtly love, an investigation which is relevant to our present study of Chaucer. Certainly we


must accept Denomy's conclusion that courtly love, as presented in Andreas' De Amore, is neither Christian nor pagan. He reasons that its origin is obviously not Christian because the woman becomes the center of cultivation for earthly love, and it is not pagan because the pagan conception of love would recognize the pleasures and delights to be derived from sensual desires and indulgence; it would never provide the basis for a dogma that such carnal desires fanned by sensual delights ennobled man and was the fount of virtue.\(^1\)

But Denomy's ultimate conclusion, that there is a complete divorce between carnal and spiritual love in the courtly love tradition, is open to question. For enlightening evidence on this problem, we must turn to the De Amore of Andreas Capellanus.

Andreas' blueprint for courtly love recognizes two basic types of love, namely, pure and mixed:

It is the pure love which binds together the hearts of two lovers with every feeling of delight. This kind consists in the contemplation of the mind and the affection of the heart; it goes as far as the kiss and the embrace and the modest contact with the nude lover, omitting the final solace, for that is not permitted to those who wish to love purely. This is the kind that anyone who is intent upon love ought to embrace with all his might, for this love goes on increasing without end, and we know that no one ever regretted practicing it, and the more of it one has the more one wants. This love is distinguished by being of such virtue that from

\(^1\)Denomy, p. 29.
it arises all excellence of character, and no injury comes from it, and God sees very little offense in it. But that is called mixed love which gets its effect from every delight of the flesh and culminates in the final act of Venus.\(^\text{18}\)

The pure love of which Andreas speaks is considered the highest perfection of the code, and the criteria of this love is not the degree of its intensity but the degree of its refinement. Through the slow and mysterious operation of pure love, a man shows his good character and his good breeding by practicing self-restraint and self-mastery, types of virtue which ennoble him so that his love gives minimal offense to God. On a lower level exists mixed love. Although it too is a means of attaining the beautiful figure, it is definitely a greater concession to what is gross and base in man since it yields to the perilous admixture of voluptuousness and thereby dilutes the purer form of human love. Where pure love puts more emphasis on acceptance, mixed love places greater approval on possession and consummation.

From Andreas' classification it is readily evident that though pure and mixed love are basically the same kind of love, carnal, they do vary in their degree of carnality, and this gradated variation, of course, can

\(^{18}\)All quotations are from John Jay Parry, trans. The Art of Courtly Love by Andreas Capellanus (New York, 1941). For further distinctions between pure and mixed love, see II.vi.
be viewed in terms of hierarchical ordering. The degree of moral guilt or culpability attached to mixed love exceeds that of pure love and, vice versa, pure love has more virtue associated with it.\(^{19}\) It is in this respect that Denomy commits an oversight because he refuses to see any virtue in this carnal hierarchy. Instead he avers that carnal love and divine love are two different kinds of love, not varying gradations of love. But any motion towards divine love has to begin on the level of sensation, whether love or beauty causes the excitation. Only theoretically is it possible to say that man can immediately focus his love on the divine without progressing through the gamut of human love. Even the greatest mystic does not start directly with this higher love. Love for him is also a never-ending process of discovery in which he moves from a more complex and more knowable form of love to a simpler and less knowable one. Man as well as the mystic, practically speaking, does not just spring to divine love; he must begin with a passage through a lower type of love even if it is carnal. Consequently, to make a dichotomy between carnal and divine love is a

\(^{19}\)The *De Amore* contains many references to the virtuousness of love; for the more important references see: I.i, p. 29; I.ii, p. 30; I.iv, p. 31; I.vi, p. 35; I.vi, dial. 6, p. 88.
mistake, for in the practical world of human imperfection, the lower forms of love are a necessity. By positing a hierarchy of love on the sense level and by making its object love or beauty, Andreas is attempting to depict man's first movement up the hierarchical ladder. His comments in the De Reprobatione make more sense if we understand him as saying that the last rung of the ladder can only be reached by way of the first, that the lower love should yield to the higher, and that love must be a means to an end, not an end in itself. This realization partly explains the consequent elevation of the troubadours' courtly love theme in the stilnovisti school of love, which was known to Chaucer from his reading of Dante.

Of Chaucer's knowledge and admiration for Dante there can be no doubt. Paget Toynbee notes that Chaucer's indebtedness to Dante, whom he calls "the wise poete of Florence" in The Wife of Bath's Tale and "the grete poete of Ytaille" in The Monk's Tale, is evident in at least sixteen different poems where he translates almost literally more than a hundred lines of the Divine Comedy from all three of its major divisions. In addition, J. A. W.

20Dante in English Literature from Chaucer to Cary, I (London, 1909), I. W. P. Friederich in Dante's Fame Abroad, p. 180, as recently as 1950 sees Toynbee's Dantean research as monumental. Furthermore, for a complete list of scholars who have studied Dante's influence on Chaucer, see Friederich, pp. 182-90.
Bennett acknowledges the high incidence of Dantean borrowings which occur in the *House of Fame* and the *Parliament of Fowls*, but if we follow W. P. Friederich's arrangement of these borrowings according to the order of their importance, we must begin with the *Canterbury Tales*. This "Dante in English," an appellation applied to Chaucer by Lydgate, also shows a reliance on the *Convivio* and demonstrates his ease in using Dante for his own purposes by the artful adaptation of Dante's *terza rima* in his "Compleynyt to His Lady." Dantean influences so permeate the works of Chaucer that they lead Lounsbury to remark that no one is likely to dispute either his thorough indebtedness to Dante or his complete mastery of him.

It is difficult to imagine that Dante's passion for order and his preference for hierarchical modes of thought could go unnoticed by the acute and scholarly Chaucer when they are among the first observations made by students

---


22 Friederich, p. 182.


24 Lounsbury, II, 237.
of Dante. In fact, it has even become a general sup-
position of Dantean scholarship that Dante's fundamental
credo is an overriding belief in order. For instance,
this widely accepted fact causes Gerald Walsh to observe:

He [Dante] saw everywhere with his senses the order
of parts to wholes: the designs, the plans, the
proportions, the harmonies that make the face of the
world so fair. He saw deeper with his thought the
order of nature and ends, the purposes and final
causes: the teleology that gives the world its meaning for the mind. And with his Faith, quite fully,
and partly with his reason, he saw more than outer
plan, more than immediate purpose; he saw the ultimate Providence of God lifting the rational meaning
of human life to the mysterious level of a Divine
destination.

The various ditches, terraces, and spheres encountered in
Dante's works represent more than mere physical and cosmo-
logical ordering of phenomena since they also symbolize
ethical and aesthetical ordering of the soul as it moves
along the spiritual ladder to the divine. Thus what Dante
says about goodness, beauty, and love is meant to lead in
one direction, namely, towards greater truth and greater
self-discovery in God, but what is unique with Dante is
his choice of director, a beautiful woman.

25 Two recent studies of the concept of hierarchy in
Dante and its use in interpreting the Divine Comedy are:
Comedy (London, 1960) and Joseph A. Mazzeo, Medieval Cul-
tural Tradition in Dante's "Comedy" (New York, 1968).

Unlike Boethius who had Lady Philosophy as his guide in the regeneration of his soul, Dante had the vision of the beautiful Beatrice lighting up the Platonic ladder to ultimate beauty and love. Although Beatrice possessed all the corporeal beauty of the woman in the courtly love tradition, as the *Convivio* (III, viii) clearly states, her beauty was to initiate and to carry the soul of Dante on its journey towards immaterial beauty and love, a course which was necessary if Dante was not to lose himself in the labyrinth of carnal love. In opposition to Francesca's enervating beauty, which doomed her to the second circle of hell, the dynamic beauty of Beatrice so functioned that it radiated light on mere material objectives, so that Dante could recognize the dross of sensuality and the dangers of preoccupation with himself. And as a result of the image of Beatrice's beauty constantly abiding with him, Dante did not allow concupiscent love to reign over him but, instead, permitted virtue to enter his

27Maurice Valency in *In Praise of Love* (New York, 1958) studies the courtly love theme and its development in the *stilnovisti* school of poets. He makes quite clear Beatrice's role in the ladder of beauty and love. Charles Williams, on the other hand, in *The Figure of Beatrice: A Study in Dante* (London, 1955) traces the spiritualizing figure of Beatrice in the major works of Dante. Also see Charles S. Singleton, *Dante Studies: Journey to Beatrice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1958).
life in such a manner that the finite modes of beauty and love yielded to their infinite source. Accordingly in this hierarchical scheme predicated on beauty and love, Beatrice operated as the mediatrix between the life of the flesh and the life of the spirit. Her high and noble task involved the elevation of the sensual and more chaotic desires of the sensitive soul to the more ordered and intellectual desires of the rational soul. The final significance of Dante's Beatrice was rather astounding: a woman became the principal nexus between God and man. Desire no longer terminated in her as it had done earlier in the courtly love tradition, but it moved onward to God since man did not come to worship as a votary at the shrine of beauty; instead he sought to reverence woman because her beauty was not only a reflection of divine love and divine beauty but also a means of participation in God. This, most likely, was one of the more important lessons that Chaucer learned from Dante.

Since Dantean love was the consequence of the integration of the courtly love of the troubadours and the metaphysics of Saint Thomas Aquinas, no study of the concept of hierarchy is complete without some consideration of the

28 Some scholars who note this fact are Valency, p. 225, and Bennett, p. 11.
concept of love as it is explained in the *Summa Theologica*. As a correlate of his treatment of the good and the beautiful, Saint Thomas discusses love and its operation. Initially he views love under a double aspect. From the point of view of the subject striving for the attainment of its object, love is a concupiscible power; and from the point of view of the object loved, love is a passion (I-II, Q. 26, a. 172). In all instances love causes locomotion and appetition once its object is apprehended as being good, a good which may be either real or apparent. Because God is the ultimate cause of goodness and because He alone is the only enduring and completely satisfying good, all creation seeks Him as its end. Furthermore, Saint Thomas also classifies love according to the three different appetitive powers or faculties of the soul and thus a grade of love, arranged hierarchically, corresponds to each of these powers. However, since the vegetative faculty, comprising the powers of nutrition, growth, and reproduction and governing *amor naturalis*, is subsumed into the sensitive faculty, our discussion will only consider the sensitive and rational faculties of the soul.

The appetitive drives which originate in the sensitive and rational faculties proceed from the desire to reach their objects and to be united with them. *Amor sensitivus,*
which is the aptitude of the sensitive powers to seek their respective objects, is seen in animals, and in men only when they permit themselves to be engrossed in their sense impressions without the government of reason. Consequently, sensual love is the exclusive appetition of the sensitive soul when it elicits corporeal gratification as a means in itself. On the other hand, higher than sensitive or sensual love is rational love (amor rationalis), which is proper to man alone. This "intellectual" love differs from the preceding in that its object is the good as made known by the light of the intellect and reason, and it is a love which is operative by the free choice of the will. In man, rational love should regulate sensitive love and should indicate what direction human love must take if it is to reach fruition. The point is that instead of frustrating desire by denying its object, rational love elevates the lower love by raising it to something beyond itself, namely, a higher good. At the same time, we must reiterate, sensitive love is good and is a viable means to God. For that reason it can never be absolutely rejected.

Finally, we must remember that human love conceived in the Thomistic manner is predicated on man's natural predilection to seek what is good for him and that the
beautiful is the same as the good (I-II, q. 27, a. 1).
Like the notion of good, the beautiful is that which calms desire by being seen or known. It is for this reason that Saint Thomas says that sight is the beginning of love in the human order. As long as the rational soul continues to guide and to direct the will in its choice of beauty, physical beauty can become the expression of spiritual beauty. In the last analysis the Thomistic universe is more than a scale of creatures, for it is a hierarchy which purifies, illuminates, and perfects. By a series of mediate goods, loves, and beauties, subject to the influence of the rational soul, man is led upward to the single goal of divinization and to a God who is the author of all order, whether it is ethical, amatory, or aesthetic.

In summary, by the fourteenth century hierarchical modes of thought not only permeated the ecclesiastical, the political, and the social order but also the moral order, and we can be fairly certain that Geoffrey Chaucer had a formal and direct knowledge of these modes of hierarchy both from philosophical and theological sources. From Macrobius, Boethius, and Dante, Chaucer envisaged hierarchical order under the aspects of good, love, and beauty, and simultaneously he learned the positive progression which man must make through good, love, and
beauty if he is to reach God. In addition, from patristic sources Chaucer received a commentary on these hierarchisms. 29

In the preceding statement I emphasized "positive progression" because too much consideration has been given to negative philosophy and theology in the works of Chaucer. With such a heavy emphasis on rejection, on what man should not do, such as we encounter in the criticism of Denomy, Chaucer's humor and his ability to laugh at the human condition in a gentle manner cannot be fully appreciated. To truly realize Chaucer at his best, we must not conceive of his use of hierarchy in terms of rejecting the lower elements of good, love, and beauty but must view hierarchy as a means by which man can make a positive step-by-step progression to higher levels of virtue. With this important distinction in mind, we can proceed with our study of the Parliament of Fowls.

29Robertson in his Preface, of course, pointed out the voluminous outpouring of patristic writings, besides those of Saint Thomas, which deluged Chaucer's age and which emphasized the concept of hierarchy, especially as it existed in the aesthetics of Saint Augustine, pp. 52-137. It should also be noted that Robertson's study of hierarchy is substantially different from my own. He gives more attention to the Christian synthesis permeating the fourteenth century than to the concept of hierarchy as a principle of structural unity in Chaucer's poems. Furthermore, his conclusions in his treatment of the Parliament of Fowls vary widely from my own since he puts greater negative emphasis on the concept of hierarchy.
Chapter II. Scipio and Common Profit

In many ways the most critically vexing of Chaucer's love-vision poems is the *Parliament of Fowls*, which persists in presenting major interpretational problems to scholarship. While many critics generally acknowledge the poem's freshness and universality and recognize that its theme concerns Chaucer's attitude toward love, some of them, without deliberately obscuring the intention of the poem, have been dissatisfied with its unity and have, therefore, regarded it as a precious trifle. Far too often the critics have failed to find the important connections between the *Somnium Scipionis* and the rest of the poem. In this respect Robert K. Root, John Speirs, and J. S. P. Tatlock feel that the *Somnium* is an unfortunate piece of introductory machinery, whereas Charles Muscatine and Robert O. Payne agree that the *Parliament* is a symmetrical and precise poem which falsely suggests a unity and harmony of content.¹ These viewpoints are the incorrect

¹For these viewpoints see *The Poetry of Chaucer*, rev.
way to look at the poem, for it is carefully planned and coordinated, revealing an overall unity based on a hierarchy of love.

The fact is that most students of the poem are immediately aware of its unity, but in many instances they have asserted reasons for it which are highly individual. Accordingly the earliest group of scholars disputed whether the poem has a historical application and attempted to discover an event in real life which would fit the poem, particularly the portion of it which presents the rivalry of the three aristocratic eagles for the favor of the beautiful formel. Of the historical theories, that originally proposed by John Koch and later modified by Oliver F. Emerson has received the widest interest. In the amended form of the Koch-Emerson theory, the debate section of the poem (ll. 295-658) is viewed as a historical allegory of the projected marriage of Richard II and Anne of Bohemia, which finally occurred in January of 1382.

1 These theories are presented in "Ein Beitrag zur Kritik Chaucers," Englische Studien, 1 (1877), 249-93, and in "The Suitors in Chaucer's Parlement of Foules," Modern Philology, 8 (1910), 1-62.
Frederick of Meissen and Charles VI of France are the rival suitors. However, since the identification between the poem and the facts in the historical event does not exactly correspond, those accepting this theory are ready to allow for a certain amount of poetic license. Thus other events have also been suggested. Edith Rickert, for instance, identified the formel eagle as Philippa of Lancaster, eldest daughter of John of Gaunt, whose betrothal was under consideration in 1380-81, but none of the historical personages equated with the three male eagles in Rickert's theory was actually a suitor. On the other hand, Haldeen Braddy proposed associating the poem with the peace negotiations of 1377, which according to Froissart's chronicle included the discussion of a marriage between the youthful Richard and the young Princess Marie of France.

3"A New Interpretation of The Parlement of Foules," Modern Philology, 18 (1920), 1-29.

been only one rival, so that the third eagle lacks identification. From the foregoing criticisms it is readily obvious that no complete interpretation of the *Parliament* can be based on ascertaining the historical figures represented in it. The sense of seriousness, truth to nature, and good-natured humor which Chaucer conveys in the poem do not depend on our reading Richard II for the royal tercel eagle and Anne of Bohemia or Marie of France for the formel eagle, for the substitution of historical personages for birds does not explain why the poem is a masterpiece.

In the same type of study, another group of readers have devoted their efforts to speculating on a broader historical application of the allegory in the poem by dividing the lower birds hierarchically into four general categories: birds of prey, seed-fowl, worm-fowl, and water-fowl, with each group representing a different class of society. The birds of prey stand for the nobles, the seed-fowl for the agricultural class, the worm-fowl for the bourgeoisie, and the water-fowl for the merchants. David Patrick argues that it is unnecessary to see in these social classes anything except the natural reaction of this segment of society against the sentiments and
artificiality of courtly love. He maintains that the poem is not a satire of the inadequacy of the common birds to understand the more sophisticated points of the code of courtly love, but the indifference of the aristocratic eagles to the solid common sense of the lower classes.

Holding the exploitation of satire in the love-debate between the two major groups of birds as the key issue, the vast number of critics have opposed Patrick's view and have favored the courtlier birds. Theodore W. Douglas states that the poem's satire is directed against the lower classes because they are unable to fully appreciate the finer facets of the courtly code. With this basic interpretation William G. Dodd agrees but adds that the essential question is whether a lover, no matter what the circumstances, should remain faithful to his inamorata.

Both Nevil Coghill and C. S. Lewis deny that the Parliament is a satire on the courtly foolishness of the aristocratic eagles.


6"What Is the Parlement of Foules?" *Modern Language Notes*, 43 (1928), 381.

7*Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower* (Boston, 1913), p. 128.
cratic eagles. Moreover, Lewis qualifies his statement by commenting that the lower birds are a comic libation within the structure of the poem for Chaucer's audience. Kemp Malone also favors the nobler birds because the lower birds are a social class so inferior that they are unable to understand the higher love practiced by the other class.

Furthermore, some commentators suppose that Chaucer presents an impartial picture of the two major groups of birds. Among these is Emile Legouis, who states that the Parliament "is a scene of the great human comedy," displaying Chaucer's impartiality as a storyteller, but despite his disapproval of the gross-mindedness of the common birds, Chaucer feels obligated to let them expose the artificiality of the noble birds. While Derek S. Brewer holds that Chaucer treats both groups impartially, he believes that the balance of sympathy in the poem lies with the aristocratic birds. Dorothy Everett is even more

---


9 Chapters on Chaucer (Baltimore, 1951), p. 75.


impartial, stating that "Chaucer portrays both parties faithfully, but holds the scales equally between them, giving no sign of sympathizing with either." R. E. Thackaberry envisages the poem as a satire on both the upper and lower classes, by suggesting that Chaucer was satirizing both classes in a moral-social allegory which deplored the continual strife and confusion existing in the social order of his time. We should note that any critical attempt to confine the interpretation of the poem within the narrow limits of the debate section is subject to failure because this kind of interpretation concentrates only upon the debate of the conventional love-allegory and, hence, only cursorily treats of the segments of the poem dealing with the Somnium and the garden of Venus. Consequently, any unity that these critics perceive


in the Parliament is superficial and inadequate.

As a result of these objections and of the growing need to find unity in the poem, such critics as Bertrand H. Bronson and Gardiner B. Stillwell have been led to interpret the Parliament as something of an ironic comedy. Bronson's fundamental contention is that irony, immediately evident in the opening sententia, holds the different parts of the poem together.\(^4\) He feels that Chaucer, from the introductory stanza on, repeatedly insinuates a subtle and humorous approach to love. Initially, Chaucer develops the poem's irony by his righteous detestation of the experience of love, by following this with a philosophic commentary on it, by creating the stoical Africanus as his guide to its portals, and by emphasizing his own role as a passive onlooker (pp. 204-05). Bronson's viewpoint, however, is inaccurate and unsatisfactory insofar as it employs an artistic technique as a means of explaining the basic structure of the poem, and at the same time he never completely investigates Chaucer's more meaningful attitude towards love. For instance, in commenting on the Somnium Scipionis, Bronson states that the dreamer has stumbled onto the Somnium while searching for love materi-

\(^4\)"In Appreciation of Chaucer's Parlement of Foules," University of California Publications in English, 3 (1935), 198.
al and continues reading because the dream has fascinated him, a circumstance which results from the dream's irrelevance to his subject rather than its relevance (p. 203). This statement does not account for the full significance of love, especially the emphasis on "commune profyt," which is definitely a central issue in the poem. Yet this does not mean that the Parliament is solemn and humorless, only that the ironically humorous parts of the poem must be integrated with Chaucer's attitude towards love.

Gardiner B. Stillwell likewise stresses that the poem is a human comedy, one in which realists and idealists are ironically juxtaposed as universal types of humanity.¹⁵ For example, in all their unswerving loyalty to the courtly code, Stillwell contends, the idealistic aristocratic tercels are extremely amusing. The comedy results from the fact that while the male eagles enact the ritual of the love code, their superficial mannerisms are obviously ridiculous. In spite of their royal blood, they are not aristocratic in their actions or speech. On the other hand, the distance between the two major social classes is so wide that the lower birds completely fail to

understand and to appreciate the sentiments of the noble class, and this occasions the humor (pp. 483-84). Like Bronson, Stillwell is also blind to Chaucer's predominant theme of love.

A recent school of allegorical criticism regards the ironic antithesis between the Somnium Scipionis and the garden of Venus as symbolic of a moral dilemma which confronted Chaucer in his choice between true and false felicity, that is, the Boethian doctrine that man is confronted with a moral choice whether to pursue real good or to reject it in favor of apparent good. The first critic of the Parliament to develop this thesis was R. C. Goffin, whose study of the first ninety-one lines of the poem was considerably expanded by Robert M. Lumiansky.

At the core of Lumiansky's interpretation is Chaucer's statement that he sought a "certeyn thing" in Macrobius. Lumiansky urges that the certain thing is "a way to reconcile true and false felicity," namely, a means of justifying his interest in love poetry with his desire for sal-


vation. After stating that the elder Africanus instructed Scipio that perfect bliss is only attained by those who shun earthly joys, Chaucer remarks that at nightfall he put aside his book and went to bed. Sadness overcame him because he read what he had not looked for and had not read that which he sought. What he had not looked for was the emphasis on true felicity in heaven, and what he sought and had not found was the reconciliation of worldly pleasures with the hope of perfect bliss in heaven (pp. 83-84). For those skeptical of his interpretation, Lumiansky points out two conclusions that are worthy of note. First, Chaucer's statement of his moral dilemma, initially developed in the "envelope" and frequently reiterated throughout the poem, unifies the Parliament. Second, the philosophical content of the poem indicates an earlier state, that is, a justification of his love poetry in view of his religious dilemma, which is stated more effectively later in his retractions.  

18 Ibid., p. 89. Also see J. A. W. Bennett, The Parliament of Foules: An Interpretation (Oxford, 1957), pp. 24-47, in which he agrees with Lumiansky's basic thesis. However, Dorothy Bethurum in "The Center of the Parliament of Foules," Essays in Honor of Walter Clyde Curry (Nashville, Tennesse, 1954), pp. 39-50, disagrees with both critics because they assume that the medieval criteria of unity was the same as our own. Taking into account the poem's emphasis on human perversity, she maintains that the garden of love is the center around which the poem is built.
Lumiansky's interpretation explains the poem's inconclusiveness by attributing it to Chaucer's moral dilemma, it disregards the stress which Chaucer gives to the various degrees of love and to the humor pervading the love-debate. If we accept this view, there is little separating the Parliament from a moral treatise. Finally, his interpretation establishes a dualistic world and only superficially bridges the two, all of which leaves us with the impression that Chaucer's purpose is overly serious and didactic.

Taking issue with this too philosophical and too pedagogical approach, Robert W. Frank, Jr., argues that natural, physical love is too powerful a force to be contained within a rigid set of rules or to be restricted to any one philosophy. According to Frank, the three parts of the Parliament, differing in content, tone, and mode of treatment, are actually the agents of the poem's unity. Each part, containing a specific attitude towards love, makes a convincing case for itself, but when all the parts are juxtaposed, they make one another appear inadequate and ridiculous (pp. 538-39). It is, however, through this comic juxtaposition of attitudes that a sense of love's immeasurable power finally emerges. Thus in its own comic

way the Parliament pays homage to love. Although Frank lacks the heavy ironic stress of Bronson or Stillwell, he holds that the basic structure of the poem is comic. But he too may be grouped with these critics insofar as his theory is mainly relegated to a criticism of the last half of the Parliament and also does not adequately consider the other-worldliness of it.

Another group of critics regards the Parliament as a contrast between natural love, "commune profyt," and courtly love. Charles 0. MacDonald, Dorothy Everett, and Derek S. Brewer fall within this broad category. MacDonald asserts that a wide divergence exists between love according to Nature, which is a kind of holy love approved of by God, and love according to the artifices of the courtly love tradition, which leads to sorrow and despair. 20 Though MacDonald comes close to overstating his case at times, he demonstrates an understanding of the different parts of the poem and is able to coordinate them. For instance, he explains how the two inscriptions, symbolizing the two major types of love, over the gate to the garden of Venus are realized within the garden itself and

reflected in the debate between the aristocratic and the common birds (p. 278). Simultaneously he points out the irony which is inherent in the assemblage of birds. On the other hand, while Everett emphasizes many of the points which MacDonald notes, her overriding thesis is that the Parliament is Chaucer's most successful love-allegory because it is a well-planned contrast of attitudes. By setting off these ironic contrasts one against another, Chaucer is able to give a straightforward presentation of love (pp. 97-115).

In 1953 Brewer conceived of the Parliament as Chaucer's depiction of the folly of the human condition, a state in which Nature sanctions Boethian love and in which man, represented in the convocation of birds, shares according to his capacity. However, in his 1960 edition of The Parlement of Foulys he somewhat amends his views and sees the poem as a general questioning of the nature of love. This thesis explains the inconclusive nature of the poem since "love . . . is of interest, not the fate of any individuals" (p. 24). Nevertheless, Brewer seems

21 Everett, pp. 97-115.
22 Chaucer (London, 1953), p. 84.
to forget that Chaucer says that he learned of love in "bokes" which he read often for pleasure or for doctrine. Consequently, in his interpretation Brewer tends to put questions of doctrine in the background and not notice them.

Still another group of critics undertakes a structural analysis of the poem in terms of the function of the dreamer-poet. Among these critics are Charles A. Owen, Jr., and Donald C. Baker. Owen applies a threefold classification to the role of the dreamer-poet: first, he is a lover who relies on a dream to resolve the dilemma between physical love and altruistic love; second, he is a poet who unconsciously parodies the love-vision convention he employs; third, he is a philosopher who sets forth the triumph of free will over instinct in a poem celebrating Saint Valentine's Day. As Owen himself mentions in the introduction to his article, the *Parliament* is highly complex, but he succeeds only in obfuscating its meaning by echoing Freudian dream analysis. As will be made clear, Chaucer does not have to resort to the indirection of a dream for the resolution of his amatory dilemma. Owen, however, gives much needed attention to the

function of the poet in this poem.

Baker studies not only the nature and function of the poet in the *Parliament* but also the nature and function of love in the Boethian universe. He contends that Chaucer wrote the poem as a justification of love and, by implication, of his own status as a love-poet (p. 96). Accordingly, Chaucer justified himself and his poem by a commentary on the typical stoic denunciation of love. Baker attempts to show that by contrast with the cold Boethian universe, love in accordance with nature is good. In short, Baker's mistake is one that we found earlier in Lumiansky, for he also divides the world of love into a dualistic system. In addition, he denigrates the higher level of love.

Currently, scholars are becoming more aware of a greater sophistication, on the part of both Chaucer and his audience, in interpreting the *Parliament of Fowls*. This new movement received its greatest impetus under the guidance of Bernard F. Huppé and D. W. Robertson, Jr. They recognize the magnificent Christian synthesis around which the poem was composed and attempt to apply it objectively in understanding the poem. Their major premise

\(^{25}\text{Baker, p. 86.}\)

\(^{26}\text{Fruyt and Chaf (Princeton, 1963), pp. 101-48.}\)
is that the Christian faith was part of Chaucer's intellectual milieu and that it was from this "foreground" that he drew his inspiration. Thus when Venus and Cupid, the lecherous goose, the self-seeking cuckoo, and the foolish eagles are set against the Christian synthesis, the contrast between illicit love and love in accord with God's order is absolutely clear. As a result "the solemn nonsense of the protestations of the irrational lover" becomes a subject for medieval laughter as well as instruction (p. 146). In spite of their recognition of the humor inherent in this contrast, Huppé and Robertson, like Lumiansky and his followers, have a tendency to see the Parliament as a medieval tract, thereby invalidating much of their criticism by overemphasizing an exegetical approach to the poem. Yet, in placing the poem against the "foreground" in which it was written, they have brought some heretofore obscure points to light.

From the many attempts to interpret the poem, it seems clear that most critics are unwilling to consider the poem simply as an animal fable, for they undoubtedly feel that the Parliament is not a matter of mere historical identity or an attitude towards love whose esoteric doctrine could only be understood by a courtly audience. Whether that situation or another topical allusion has been identified
remains an open question and also one which more recent critics seem reluctant to discuss because it is not a central issue in the poem. From the foregoing survey it is likewise evident that critics generally agree that Chaucer questions the nature of love in the Parliament, but they are uncertain about his approach to the problem. Yet when we are confronted with the bulk of their criticism, other salient points which they make stand out. First, the poem structurally has a highly complex unity, delivered with the simplicity, freshness, and verve of Chaucer's best poetic manner. Second, a rich vein of humor runs through the poem, whether through the medium of satire or irony or both. Last, a medieval philosophical synthesis permeates the Parliament, which must be considered in any complete understanding of the poem. Of course, all these points are generalizations. Nevertheless, they furnish guidelines which should be followed in a critical study and evaluation of the poem. The crux of presenting an acceptable interpretation appears to hinge on a balance of the last two generalizations when considered with Chaucer's attitude towards love. At the same time the humorous elements must be delicately balanced against the philosophical or religious elements so that none of them has precedence. This fusion may best be accomplished by recognizing the
hierarchy of love in the *Parliament of Fowls*. In emphasizing this hierarchical concept, I do not intend for Chaucer to appear as an avid devotee of hierarchisms and thus minimize his eloquence as a poet, but I shall try to heighten our understanding of his poetic and artistic genius by explaining the unified approach which he takes to love in this poem.

Before undertaking a detailed critical analysis of the poem's unity, I should like to sketch the main line of the *Parliament*'s development and to give some indication of the categories of love found within its major divisions. Beginning with the opening *sententia*, the persona Chaucer adopts confesses that his subject matter is love by referring to the plight in which love's ambivalence has placed him. This frustrating insight (11. 1-14) functions as a prelude to the various levels of love which the poet through his narrator is attempting to analyze and to evaluate. In the *Somnium* section (11. 15-169) the first and also the highest rung of love with which Chaucer explicitly deals in the poem is love of "commune profyt," namely, love of the common good. The spectrum of love widens in the next section to include love according to nature (11. 170-210) and the blind love found in the temple of Venus (11. 211-94). When the dreamer is ig-
nominiously shoved through the double gate into a beautiful
and ordered love-garden, he immediately discovers the joy
and peace which characterize the garden because each natu-
ral creation fulfills its proper function in accordance
with the Boethian chain of love and, therefore, possesses
its proper degree of harmony. Lowest on the hierarchy of
love is the barren and selfish sensuality of Venus and her
minions. So far in the Parliament, Chaucer's sense of
hierarchical design displays itself through love's two
extremes, love of common profit (amor rationalis) and the
sensuous love of Venus (amor sensitivus), which he bal-
ances with love according to nature (amor naturalis).

The convocation of birds, over which Nature presides,
completes the final section of the poem (ll. 295-692).
Nature, the "vicaire of the almyghty lord," represents
the power of love controlling the universe by authority
of divine law, and her jurisdiction extends over both
major classes of birds, who also are universal types of
mankind. The concluding stanza (ll. 693-99) is an epilogue
in which the poet hopefully turns to other books to teach
him more of the mysteries of divine love. In brief, the
Parliament of Fowls achieves structural unity by its hier-
archical ordering of the degrees of love and by its com-
mentary on the various levels of love as a means to person-
al and collective perfection.

The stanza with which Chaucer introduces the Parlia-
ment of Fowls cannot be set down as a mere commonplace of
medieval rhetorical practice, for its complete implication
must be investigated if we are to attain the proper per-
spective on love in the poem. For an explanation we must
again depend on the Summa Theologica. In his account of
happiness Thomas Aquinas states that "nothing satisfies
man's natural desire except the perfect good which is
Happiness" (I-II, Q. 5, a. 8). Since God is Goodness
itself, man, by the "connaturalness" of his nature, has
a desire for Him as his ultimate end. Consequently, when
man seeks love as a good, in reality he acts according to
his natural inclination to participate in Love itself.
In earthly love, for example, every man unwittingly shares
in divine love. Earlier, when discussing man's ability
to attain perfect happiness, Aquinas answers:

Imperfect happiness that can be had in this life
can be acquired by man by his natural powers, in
the same way as virtue, in whose operation it con-
sists. . . . But man's perfect Happiness . . .
consists in the vision of the Divine Essence. Now
the vision of God's Essence surpasses the nature
not only of man, but also of every creature. . . .
For the natural knowledge of every creature is in
keeping with the mode of its substance. . . . But
every knowledge that is according to the mode of
created substance falls short of the vision of
the Divine Essence, which infinitely surpasses
all created substance. Consequently neither
man, nor any creature, can attain final Happiness by his natural powers. (I-II, Q. 5, a. 6)

Accordingly, in the divine scheme Love itself can never be fully realized by finite man because it has an absolute existence only in an infinite God. Applying this doctrine to the Parliament, we find in the poem that the demande d'amour, which Brewer calls a dilemma,²⁷ literally can never be answered, since man is confronted with an unattainable ideal which by his essence he must pursue throughout his life with only relative success. It is this frustration which Chaucer echoes in the opening lines of the poem:

The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne,
Th' assay so hard, so sharp the conquerynge,
The dredful joye, alwey that slit so yerne:
Al this mene I by Love, that my felynge
Astonyeth with his wonderful werkyng
So sore, iwis, that whan I on hym thynke,
Nat wot I wel wher that I flete or synke.

(11. 1-7)

On Chaucer's part this lament is twofold because he must face the problem both as a man and as a poet. As a man he must himself undertake the pursuit of love, but he is reluctant: "For al be that I knowe nat Love in dede" (1. 8). This hesitation most likely has its roots in the poet's awareness that he must experience terrestrial love

²⁷Brewer, The Parlement of Foulys, p. 11.
before he can participate in celestial love. As a poet he must present the ultimate unattainability of love to his readers while he sets forth the benefits to be derived from its quest. In short, this double lament indicates Chaucer's realization that a hierarchy of love joins human and divine love. As Chaucer seems to conclude in the body of the Parliament, a continuity of love exists from the first level of man's ascent to the last, in such a manner that love permeates each level with a greater intensity and a more complete spirituality. But since the ascent is long, arduous, and wearisome, with man many times not knowing whether he "floats or sinks," self-control and moral discipline are the only adequate preparations for the celestial journey. However, even if man makes the ascent, in this life he has only a momentary intuitive vision of Love itself, not a direct and permanent participation in God. Death alone brings this as its final reward if man has followed God's two great commandments of love, hence man's frustration. In the concluding lines of the prologue, Chaucer speaks of love's "myrakles and his crewel yre" (1. 11). In a double sense love is miraculous; amorous love draws man to itself by its vision of corporeal beauty, and divine love inspires man to pass beyond this beauty and to seek God as his ethical and
aesthetic end. Also love has a cruel ire insofar as it would lead man to ends which are unattainable on earth. With this final reference to love's ambivalence, Chaucer concludes the first section of the Parliament.

Immediately, in the Somnium section, Chaucer reemphasizes the frustration of his perception when he mentions that he sought to learn "a certeyn thing" in works both sacred and profane. The certain thing that he hopes to find is neither the comprehension of his true self nor a reconciliation to true and false felicity. It is the problem, which Chaucer again must solve as both man and poet, of attempting to reach Love himself and of presenting Love's inaccessibility to his readers, while not discouraging them from the ascent. Simultaneously, Chaucer's use of the dubitatio creates interest in his readers since he still must harmonize love's ultimate unattainability with their rational natures.

That we are correct in approaching the poem's unity and meaning through the hierarchy of love becomes more apparent when we carefully look at Chaucer's remarks on Macrobius' Commentary on the Dream of Scipio. One passage from the Somnium which the narrator singles out describes the cosmological structure of the universe:

\[28\text{The former point of view is held by Huppe, p. 102, and the latter by Lumiansky, p. 83.}\]
Thanne shewede he hym the lytel erthe that here is,
At regard of the hevenes quantite;
And after shewede he hym the nyne speres,
And after that the melodye herde he
That cometh of thilke speres thryes thre,
That welle is of musik and melodye
In this world here, and cause of armonye.

(ll. 57-63)

Thanne tolde he hym, in certeyn yeres space
That every sterre shulde come into his place
Ther it was first, and al shulde out of mynde
That in this world is don of al mankynde.

(ll. 67-70)

In this medieval concept of universal order and harmony, there exists a sharp division between everything sublunary and the rest of the universe. As Chaucer points out both here and in the *Troilus*, the difference between "the lytel erthe" and "the hevenes quantite" is mutability and constancy; thus the heavens are eternal and the sublunary earth is subject to decay. Since the earth is "ful of torment and of harde grace" (l. 65), the farther a soul travels from the earth's darkness to the heaven's brilliance, the purer and the more spiritually harmonious it becomes until the soul returns to its rightful place with God. At this juncture Bennett's observation that the medieval love-poet's theme "was often nothing less than the relation of human love to the universe itself" assumes a greater range of meaning.²⁹ By associating man's upward movement through

²⁹Bennett, p. 38.
the spheres with love itself, Chaucer is again urging the concept of a ladder of love whereby an individual may ascend from human to divine love. Precisely for this reason the earth is not a prison house for man because through love man can ascend the multitude of spheres, thereby bettering himself. This latter idea finds expression in Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy:

Only the lynage of man heveth heyest his heie heved, and stondith light with his upryght body, and byholdeth the erthes undir hym. And, but yif thou, erthly man, waxest yvel out of thi wit, this figure amonesteth the, that axest the hevene with thi ryghte visage, and hast areised thi forheved to beren up an hy thi corage, so that thi thought ne be nat ihevyed ne put lowe undir fote, syn that thi body is so heyghe areysed. (V, m.5, 16-25)

Thus in the Parliament of Fowls when Africanus admonishes Scipio: "That he ne shulde hum in the world delyte" (l. 66), he is actually counseling man to embark on perfection by seeking higher levels of love, levels which exist in the created universe.

So far we have indicated why Chaucer gives precedence to the higher levels of love. However, since the poem's structure is so closely related to his valuation of these degrees, we still must show how he employs the principle of hierarchy to unify the Parliament. For this purpose we must take special note of Africanus' caveat to the younger Scipio:
"Know thyself first immortal,
And loke ay besyly thow werche and wysse
To commune profit, and thow shalt not mysse
To comen swiftly to that place deere
That ful of blysse is and of soules cleere."
(11. 73-77)

In having Africanus introduce the concept of "commune profit," Chaucer debunks the absurd notion that man is capable of being a solitary creature with obligations only to himself, a mistaken idea which Chaucer humorously exposes in the debate section of the *Parliament*. Man needs a social life and its concomitant responsibilities to the commonweal in order to develop fully his rational, spiritual nature and to attain ultimate participation in God.\(^3^0\)

Furthermore, since the good life, a life according to Etienne Gilson in *Elements of Christian Philosophy* (1959; rpt. New York: Mentor-Omega, 1963), p. 290, relates why the medieval Christian philosophy structured society on the Great Chain of Being. Because of its relevance to the concepts with which we are dealing, some note should be taken of his explanation:

The universe is a structure of higher and lower beings, wherein the more perfect beings must act upon the less perfect ones. By thus acting upon them, the higher beings make the lower ones become similar to their causes..... In this way, lower beings are naturally ordered to the higher ones as to their own ends. Taken collectively, all beings are thus guided toward Him Who is both the prime efficient cause of the world and its last end. In the same way, a rightly constituted society should be a hierarchy of beings, made up of superior and inferior men, the superior men acting upon the inferior ones, and all of them proceeding to their ultimate end, which is their assimilation to God.
virtue, is the objective of both the individual and society, the bond between man and society is particularly close. Accordingly, when Macrobius in the Commentary terms prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance the key virtues because they have the greatest social value, he, in effect, acknowledges the inextricable bond uniting man to the common good. And this love for the common good, as Africanus stresses earlier in the Parliament (l. 47) and as Dido emphatically declares in the House of Fame (l. 310), has primacy over love "for synguler profit."

But more important to the structural organization of the poem, Chaucer via Africanus establishes the selfless love of the common good as the highest earthly criterion towards which man should strive if he is to attain unity with God. The subsequent comparisons which Chaucer makes between common profit as a means of possessing God and the other less perfect forms of love as means of attaining the same goal account for the poem's unity and dramatic effectiveness. By using this comparative approach, Chaucer concedes that man is not commanded to avoid all love or consolation from creatures but that the amor rationalis of common profit guards man more adequately against the spiritual blindness and the transiency which more frequently accompany the other forms of love.
We must note, contrary to the statements of both Mac-
Donald and Bennett,\(^\text{31}\) that this hierarchical ordering
does not mean that a genuine dichotomy unbridgedly sep-
arates all types of self-seeking love (cupiditas), even
that of sensual love, from those of altruistic love (car-
tas). In remarking that the part is ordered to the whole
as what is imperfect to what is more perfect (S.T., I-II,
Q. 90, a. 4), Thomas Aquinas not only has in mind man's
relation to the commonweal but also his participation in
the various degrees of goodness and love. From this it
logically follows that the less perfect love is naturally
ordered to the more perfect love and that no inseparable
gulf exists between sensual and altruistic love.\(^\text{32}\) For

\(^\text{31}\)See MacDonald, p. 278, and Bennett, p. 34.

\(^\text{32}\)As Gilson (\textit{ibid.}, p. 327, n. 6) points out, Thomas
Aquinas immediately associates the doctrine of participation,
which is central to Thomism, with Plato. And since
Macrobius' \textit{Commentary} is thoroughly Neoplatonic, the fol-
lowing quotation from Plato's \textit{Symposium} may help to clari-
fy the point that I am attempting to make:

He \[\text{a young man learning of love}^2\] should love one
body . . . then he should take notice that the
beauty in one body is akin to the beauty in another
body and if we must pursue beauty in essence, it
is great folly not to believe that the beauty in
all such bodies is one and the same. When he has
learnt this, he must become the lover of all beau-
tiful bodies, and relax the intense passion for
one, thinking lightly of it and believing it to be
a small thing. (W. H. D. Rouse, trans., \textit{Great Dia-
logues of Plato}, ed. Eric H. Warmington and Philip
G. Rouse \[\text{New York, 1964}\], p. 104.)
example, the love of a beautiful body has spiritual efficacy in spite of its greater imperfection when compared to common profit as long as it is not an end in itself. For this reason when Africanus cautions Scipio about "likerous folk," we should regard his warning as being directed only against those who make unrestrained sensuality a way of life, for then we realize that Chaucer, not necessarily Africanus, means they alone "shul whirle aboute th'erthe alwey in peyne" (l. 80). The concluding lines of the stanza confirm Chaucer's own belief that forgiveness should be extended to all who have repented of their licentiousness:

"foryeven al hir wikked dede
    Than shul they come into this blysful place,
    To which to comen God the sende his grace."

(11. 82-84)

Chaucer's emendation of the Somnium not only helps delete the negativism of Africanus with its Christian coloring but also allows for man's positive participation in the chain of love once the dross of excessive sensuality has been cast aside.33

Accordingly, Plato notes that no dichotomy exists between "intense passion" and love for the commonweal because the man who loves "all beautiful bodies" will necessarily see to their "commune profit."

33In the Somnium Africanus states: "The souls of those who have given themselves up to bodily pleasures and become their slaves, and who, being driven by their passions in obedience to these pleasures, have violated the laws both
The unlawful love of excessive sensuality, moreover, denotes an extreme state of the soul, a close approximation to the negative pole of unilluminated darkness referred to in the first chapter. To be a viable force towards good, love demands more than physical possession; "to conceive happiness, it must conceive a life to be shared in a varied world, full of events and activities, which shall be a new and ideal bond." Consequently, since the unlawful love of "likerous folk" cannot pass before the public in its fulfillment, it must be condemned as love not leading towards a future with God. Again, the point is that unless sensual love is love in the darkness, there can be no dichotomy, strictly speaking, between it and love of common profit. Therefore, to love is good, a point which the stoical Africanus misses, but to love common profit is better. Obviously, these two general types of love are not mutually exclusive; they can exist side by side. Where only the more imperfect form of love is found, divine and human, when they are freed from the body, revolve round earth and return hither only after long ages of torment." Commentary, IX.ii, 78-84.

34George Santayana, *Three Philosophical Poets: Lucretius, Dante, and Goethe* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1910), p. 119. Santayana, an acknowledged commentator on Dante, makes this comment in describing Dantean love. The Parliament has many Dantean echoes.
it can and should be used as a means of reaching self-perfection in divine love.

As a "servant of Love," and his service certainly is not only to Venus, Chaucer so far in the Parliament has endeavored to show love's continuity by defining its moral hierarchy and has attempted to reconcile love's unattainability with man's nature by setting up "commune profit" as a realistic and immediate end of love, one in which man can at least find a respite from love's dilemma. What Chaucer's Parson says of the social hierarchy is also applicable to love's hierarchy, for if God had not ordained degree "the commune profit myghte nat han be, ne pees and rest in erthe." Realizing this, Chaucer can insist that the man who loves common profit "shulde into a blysful place wende" (l. 48), thereby attaching to his observation a double signification. Finally, Bennett may be correct when he explains that the "newe science that men lere" (l. 25) perhaps means "the 'newe science' of scholas-

Since Frederick Tupper, "Saint Venus and the Canterbury Pilgrims," Nation, 97 (1919), 354-56, advanced the theory that Chaucer was the servant of Venus, many critics have demonstrated that Chaucer deals with the gamut of love, both secular and religious. Howard R. Patch in On Rereading Chaucer (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1948), p. 255, has even suggested an analysis of the different types of love found in Chaucer's works.

The Parson's Tale, X (I) 772.
ticism," for Chaucer exhibits a dependence on the greatest of the scholastic philosophers, Thomas Aquinas, in expounding his understanding of the hierarchy of love.

While recognizing the importance of common profit as a means of returning to God, Chaucer voices some dissatisfaction with Africanus' advice to his adopted grandson:

The day gan faylen, and the derke nyght,
That reveth bestes from here besynesse,
Berafte me my bok for lak of lyght,
And to my bed I gan me for to dresse,
Fulfyld of thought and busy hevynesse;
For bothe I hadde thyng which that I nolde
And ek I nadde that thyng that I wolde.

(11. 85-91)

From the preceding explication what Chaucer learns is quite definite, namely, his insight into the hierarchy of love, which by means of common profit channels the force of human love into Love itself. Through the love of common profit, man's love-life can assume greater order, perspective, and direction. On the other hand, what Chaucer does not seek, since he is a poet of love, is the decidedly negative value which Africanus ascribes to the efficacy of earthly love. The trouble with Africanus' concept of love is that it makes virtuous love a superhuman ideal and disregards the fact that all love is susceptible of degrees of goodness. In addition, his

37Bennett, p. 31.
concept fails to take into account that love has both its origin and maintenance in God and, therefore, can be employed as a viable means of achieving heaven. To put it briefly, the simple fact is that Africanus is a good Stoic; and although his message is spiritually vital for medieval Christians, it lacks Christian toleration of passion. Because Africanus' Stoicism looks upon every passion as essentially evil and because it refuses to make allowances for the imperfection of the human condition, it forces man to submit blindly to the inexorable law governing all things. In a discussion of Stoic moral idealism, R. D. Hicks makes an important comment about Stoic virtue:

there can be no degrees in virtue and no middle point between virtue and vice. A man's disposition either is virtuous or it is not. As there are no degrees in straightness, so one virtue is equally virtuous with another and all sin and vice, by the mere fact that it falls short of this absolute perfection, is on the same footing of equal depravity.\(^{38}\)

Hicks' conclusion is repugnant. Man's immediate goal in this life is to be a man, not a god; but human divinity is exactly what Africanus proposes when he emphasizes, "Know thyself first immortal." And so it is that Chaucer, being concerned with the justification of love both as a

man and as a poet, has no alternative but to disagree with the severe restrictions Africanus imposes on love; for seen in the light of Christianity, love has more than one place in God's universal scheme.

To understand what Chaucer is seeking but does not have, we need to remember that in order to scale the graded perfection of love, man must be resolute and possess self-mastery. In actuality, however, this is more of a problem than it at first appears; the reason is that Chaucer is convinced that the lower levels of love have some absolute value in the movement towards God since the pleasures of the senses are basically good. Unlike Africanus, who in his attempt to inculcate moral excellence overemphasizes "thou shalt not," Chaucer would embrace more of human feeling and life by stressing the positive aspects of love while not distorting man's need for discipline. But Chaucer's "nadde" is a recognition that if man is to adopt a rule of action whereby he is to strive for love of the common good, he has no choice but to check, subordinate, and control the pleasures resulting from the lower forms of love. What Chaucer and all men face, then, is an unsolvable predicament inasmuch as the elevation from the less perfect to the more perfect gradations of love cannot occur without some modicum of self-
control and restraint.

Still for another reason this stanza is worthy of close scrutiny. Its first three lines are an artful adaptation of the somber mood reflected in the opening lines of Canto Two of Dante's *Inferno*:

Day was departing, and the air, embrown'd
was taking all alive on Earth away
from their sore labours; me alone it found
Arming myself to undergo the fray
alike with pity and with the road ahead,
which my unerring memory shall portray.39

(11. 1-6)

The last two lines are from Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, in which Lady Philosophy is addressing the author:

"And was nat that," quod sche, "for that the lakkide somwhat that thow woldest nat han lakkid, or elles thou haddest that thow noldest nat han had?" (III, p.3, 33-36)

It is readily admitted that Chaucer borrows freely from many authoritative sources, but what makes these imitations so interesting and so pertinent to a discussion of the hierarchical ordering of love in the *Parliament* is the immediate context from which these lines are drawn. The high point of the second canto occurs when Beatrice, asserting that "love moved me, and 'tis love that makes me

speak" (l. 72), requests Virgil to break his long silence and to help Dante. To the influence and irresistibility of Beatrice's love, the Divine Comedy is eloquent testimony, recording as it does the liberality with which her love is poured forth on earth and how it gradually leads Dante from circle to circle, from world to world, until he glimpses the splendor of God, while on the other hand, the third book of the Consolation is taken up with the question of the Summum Bonum, the supreme Good which all men are impelled to seek if they would achieve true happiness. If man can find the good and can agree that it is something he may possess, he can begin his journey towards God.

When we consider these contexts and their implications, it is entirely appropriate that they should be juxtaposed in a stanza in which Chaucer takes issue with Africanus' unbending attitude towards love. Indeed, the close association of love with good, the means to happiness, seems to lead to the conclusion that the pursuit of love is identical with the pursuit of the supreme Good. This fact, taken together with the concept of hierarchy in the Divine Comedy and the chain of love in the Consolation, lends more support to the idea that Chaucer does not share Afri-

40 See Bennett, pp. 42-44, for further comment on this canto.
canus' divided attitude towards love but envisages the reconciliation of love with salvation through the guided perfection of the hierarchy of love. Nevertheless, the juxtaposition of these references may be happenstance, but if it is deliberate, as Baker argues, it does not reflect the confusion and undecidedness of Chaucer's thought on the place of love in God's universal plan but instead offers convincing evidence of love's hierarchy.

Wearied by his long hours of studying "Macrobye," the poet finally falls asleep and dreams of the appearance of Scipio Africanus, who promises to reward the poet for his diligence in reading the Commentary, "sumdel of thy labour wolde I quyte" (1. 112). Before the poet continues with his narrative, however, Chaucer inserts an apostrophe to the goddess Cytherea:

Cytherea! thow blysful lady swete,  
That with thy fyrbrond dauntest whom the lest,  
And madest me this sweven for to mete,  
Be thow myn helpe in this, for thow mayst best!  
As wisly as I sey the north-north-west,  
When I began my sweven for to write,  
So yif me myght to ryme and ek t'endyte!  
(11. 113-19)

To enumerate the many interpretations given to this invo-

41 Baker, pp. 93-94
cation is impractical; yet we should note that critics generally agree that Chaucer is not addressing the pagan goddess Venus (the mythological Venus), the daughter of Saturn, who commonly personifies carnal lust and illicit love, but another Venus (the astrological Venus), namely Cytherea, the sixth daughter of the Sky and the Day, who represents the benevolent planet Venus. During the Middle Ages poets often sought the patronage of this beneficent deity, so that she would inspire them to write excellent poetry, and it is for this reason that Chaucer the poet calls upon this "blysful lady swete" to help him in rhyming and in inditing.

In recognizing that Chaucer is neither invoking the lascivious Venus nor dedicating the Parliament of Fowls to her, we do not intend to rid his invocation of its association with love. To be sure, Cytherea is not regarded as the equivalent of the mythological Venus, but because of the failure of medieval poets to make a clear

42 One of the reasons this passage has caused a furor among the critics is Chaucer's cryptic reference to "north-north-west." The reader may refer to F. N. Robinson's edition of Chaucer, p. 793, n. 117, for greater detail on this issue.

43 For a discussion of the various significations of Venus in the fourteenth century see Brewer, Chaucer, pp. 67-72, 75.
distinction between the goddess and the planet, she is constantly linked with love. Such is the case with Chaucer. In the Knight's Tale, for instance, before entering the tournament against Arcite, Palamon

roos to wende on his pilgrimag Unto the blisful Citherea benigne,— I mene Venus, honourable and digné.

(I [A] 2214-16)

Again in Troilus, after experiencing blissful union with Criseyde, the hero exclaims:

"0 Love, 0 Charite! Thi moder ek, Citherea the swete, After thiself next heried be she, Venus mene I, the wel-willy planete!"

(III, 1254-57)

It is Venus, however, who at January's marriage celebration in the Merchant's Tale

with hire fyrbrond in hire hand aboute Daunceth biforn the bryde and al the route.

(IV [E] 1727-28)

The firebrand, as we learn from the Romaunt of the Rose (ll. 3705-10), symbolizes the love which the goddess extends to all men. In the present instance, then, Chaucer is most likely addressing Cytherea as a type of love goddess, and his invocation has a double function and appropriateness.

Yet we are still confronted with the suitability of this invocation in a poem structured on the principle of
hierarchy. For this answer we must return to Dante's *Divine Comedy*. In the twenty-seventh canto of the *Purgatorio*, just after Dante the pilgrim is compelled to go through the purgatorial fire that cleanses those who have been too prone to earthly love and just before the pilgrim enters the Earthly Paradise atop the steep Mount of Purgatory, which entrance will mark the culmination of his wearisome upward climb, Dante the poet describes himself as lying exhausted on the ground:

So ruminant, so gazing, it appears
sleep took me, sleep, which oft-times makes acquist
of some event, ere it in fact occurs.
About the hour, I think, when from the East
by Cytherea's first rays, who seems to flame
with ever-burning love, the mount was kiss'd.
I dreamt I saw a young and lovely dame
who, culling blossoms, through a meadow went.

(XXVII, 91-98)

The love which Cytherea radiates can hardly be anything but a prefiguration of Beatrice's totally selfless and spiritual love. Having been purged of his earthly love, the pilgrim, no longer needing Virgil's guidance (l. 142), now awaits the inspiration and mediation of Beatrice's love. Considering this view of Cytherea along with Chaucer's earlier one, we see that the planet Venus symbolizes more than one type of love. In short, she ranges the hierarchy of love from Palamon's unchaste love to Dante's divine love. Certainly then, Chaucer's dramatic appeal to
Cytherea, who "madest me this sweven for to mete," is in
keeping with the poem's structure and theme.

With the stanza immediately following the apostrophe,
we return to the Roman sage, Africanus, who seizes the
poet and forcibly leads him to the gates of a park walled
with "grene ston." Over the entrance the poet reads a
double message of hope and despair, directed at those who
would go within. Being an echo of Dante's inscription over
the portal of Hell, the two mottoes, one inscribed in
gold and the other in black, should indicate to the atten­
tive reader that they are more than conventional wordings
of the language of courtly love. Because they are more
important than a simple reading would suggest, these two
inscriptions must be quoted in full:

"Thorgh me men gon into that blysful place
Of hertes hele and dedly woundes cure;
Thorgh me men gon unto the welle of grace,
There grene and lusty May shal evere endure.
This is the way to al good aventure,

44Dante's passage reads:

"Through me ye pass into the city of woe,
through me ye pass eternal pain to prove,
through me ye pass among the lost below.
Justice did my sublime creator move:
I was created by the Power divine,
the sovereign Wisdom and the primal Love.
Save things eternal, ere this being of mine
nought was, and I eternally endure.
Ye that come in, henceforth all hope resign."
(Inferno, III, 1-9)
Be glad, thow redere, and they sorwe of-caste;  
Al open am I--passe in, and sped thee faste!"

"Thorgh me men gon," than spak that other side,  
"Unto the mortal strokes of the spere  
Of which Disdayn and Daunger is the gyde,  
Ther nevere tre shal fruyt ne leves bere.  
This strem yow ledeth to the sorweful were  
There as the fish in prysoun is all drye;  
Th' eschewing is only the remedye!"

(11. 127-40)

Both inscriptions are clearly a reiteration of the concluding lines of the prologue, where Chaucer speaks of love's "myrakles and his crewel yre." The golden letters with their religious emphasis on "the welle of grace" beckon the dreamer as well as all men to the quest of divine love, but they cannot rise to this "good venture" unless they first experience human love. Certainly, the present enunciation of this fact differs from that in the prologue. Through the detailed commentary on the concept of common profit, Chaucer has expanded his earlier statement, so that now we understand more comprehensibly the two major steps, the way of Acceptance, which must be taken to attain union with God. The point is that man can at least begin to share in divine love through the "grene and lusty May," which love offers here, but if his participation is to "evere endure," human love and the more rational love of common profit must be used as means, not as terminal ends, to God. At the same time, we cannot
overlook the emphatic Dantean influence in the last few stanzas. What better way has Chaucer to confirm his hierarchy of love than by suggestive overtones from the Divine Comedy, Dante's own great tribute to the efficacy of love. Finally, although both poems emphasize the hierarchical attainment of God, in each poem the primary means to Him is markedly different; in the Parliament love of the common good assuredly leads man upward, and in the Comedy the love of a beautiful woman causes man's spiritual progress.

Instead of heeding the hopeful letters, because of the dire warning of the black inscription, the dreamer hesitates at the entrance to the garden. His impasse is understandable, for the darker letters caution him that man faces despair unless he is resolute in his efforts to gain self-control. On both the material and spiritual planes, man inevitably courts death--in this instance the courtly love symbolized by "Disdayn and Daunger"--when he does not eschew love as an end in itself. Similarly, mistaking the means for the end also explains why the "tre" (l. 137), a type of the Tree of Life and as such a symbol for grace, bears neither foliage nor fruit. The dreamer's inability at that time to arrive at a decision represents the predicament of the Christian who aspires to obey God's
laws, but who remains indecisive on account of the over­whelmed consciousness of his own inadequacy to choose correct values and his consequent fear of ultimate fail­ure. Scipio Africanus may be an ironic choice of a guide to a love garden; nonetheless, when he is faced with the narrator's timidity and hesitancy, he quickly resolves the issue by pushing him through the gate, soberly reminding him at the same time that he is to be a mere observer of the ways of love, not a participator. In either case, the fact remains that if the poet is to learn of love, he must act decisively; he cannot recount what he does not know.

As suggested earlier in this chapter, the Parliament of Fowls contains a rich vein of humor, evident even in this section with its almost too philosophical concern with the Somnium Scipionis. Chaucer, notwithstanding, successfully achieves the delicate balance between teaching and delighting, which prevents him from overemphasizing the weighty considerations of the Somnium, through the masterful development of the persona he adopts, a narrator who is hesitant, naive, uncomplicated, and inexperienced in love, and through the elder Scipio, a superbly inappro­priate guide to the Garden of Love. There is humor and broad irony in having Chaucer the creator, a highly culti­vated and respected courtier of his age, appear as Chaucer
the narrator, a man who has little learning and who makes few judgments. Can we agree with the farsightedness of the narrator who turns to the Somnium for consolation in love? Or can we doubt the simple-mindedness of the narrator who, after citing a list of analogies that suggest men dream of what is uppermost in their waking minds, questions the cause of Africanus' dream visitation? Or again, can we mistake the comic irony of Chaucer the creator when he has Africanus accuse the persona of losing his taste for love? The instances of such irony are myriad. Yet the ostensible conclusion, that Chaucer intends the reader to be amused by his two incongruous characters, does not sufficiently justify the irony. To explain the habitual pose of the narrator solely as a humorous device to achieve irony by contrast is redundant and a weak response to the poet's artistry. Consequently, we must look for a deeper meaning behind Chaucer's artistic purpose.

From a critical point of view this section of the Parliament depends on the naivete of Chaucer's projected persona for its meaning. Initially, the poet commands the reader's interest through the obliquity naturally inherent in the narrator's posture as a stout, obtuse fellow with

45 Baker, pp. 97-98.
little experience in love. The uncertainty, especially evident in the prologue, generated by this dull nonhero has a stimulating effect on the reader because he is never quite sure whether wisdom and perceptivity are really speaking or whether it is only the unsophisticated, self-deprecatory questioner who is before him. But a point frequently missed, even in Dorothy Bethurum's fine study of the narrator in Chaucer's love poems, is that since Chaucer the poet-creator accompanies the fictional narrator at every moment, the persona's vacillation, anxiety, and doubt, to some extent, also characterize his originator's personality. The result of this quasi-identification between creator and character implies strongly that the poet Chaucer realizes he likewise shares the narrator's frustrating inability to fathom love's ambivalence, a condition which he earlier concedes to be the lot of all men, who are ignorant but zealous seekers of knowledge and truth. Those denying the kinship of creator and narrator have only to remember that when Chaucer yields the dictatorial reins to Africanus and as a persona becomes the butt of abuse, he is deliberately repudiating all pretense of self-righteousness, which of course places him on the moral level of

his spokesman. In effect, this act again reflects Chaucer's personal requirement to embrace common profit more completely, to place social betterment over individual desire, and to seek the higher realms of love.

Not only is this element of exaggerated self-presentation important in having Chaucer take himself seriously, a matter with which both Edward Wagenknecht and C. N. Stavrou disagree, but it further accounts for the poet's lack of vigorous contempt and holy indignation when confronted with the obvious shortcomings of mankind. What I am now saying is that, although Chaucer the creator-poet is never present explicitly in the first part of the Parliament, through the mask of the bungling poetaster, he broadly hints at a relationship between himself and his audience. It seems to me that the author who unabashedly admits he needs instruction in love, who has the gumption to descry his own dullness, and who is unafraid to look at the ridiculous spectacle of himself being plummeted through the gates of a garden assuredly has a large and benign capacity for accepting his readers as he finds them. Chaucer is well aware that beneath the mask of his comic pose lies an imperfect human nature which, we see, enables him

to visualize the world in humorous perspective. In the last analysis, the narrator's ignorance and simplicity establish the poet's humanity of outlook and explain his human commitment to his characters, to his audience, and to himself.

We may rightly marvel at this human commitment, especially since, as Arnold noted, it is accomplished without tragic intensity and without the perennial conflict between hope and despair. These are absent from this section of the poem because of Chaucer's acceptance of the propositions that pleasure and enjoyment of life are good, that in man's passage to divine love there is definitely a place for the more human types of love. To depict life's tragic ironies, its mortifications, its constant oscillating movement between expectation and hopelessness would be a subversion of the poet's convictions. Furthermore, it would be contrary to the effect Chaucer wishes to create in his audience. An example in point is the character Africanus who possesses the lacerating potential for a misanthropic onslaught against man. Instead of this, his comic portrayal as a carping critic blunts the barbs of his cynicism and of his rabid idealism. Needless to say, with this deft manipulation Africanus loses none of his effectiveness as an oracle promulgating love of common
profit, but he also performs the additional function of teaching delightfully by dissipating disordered passions through harmless amusement. By means of this pleasing caricature and that of his persona, Chaucer accents the permissibility of pleasure for his audience and provides the respite necessary to life's taxing struggles without diverting his readers from their ultimate goal.

In summary, we may conclude that it is evident that Chaucer chose to catalyze man's serious questioning of love into comedy because a humorous motif is more in keeping with his philosophy of "pleasure" and with his positive view of human limitations. Further, although Dante more aptly may be called the poet of love, Chaucer's sympathetic vision is predicated on the belief that man's greatest dignity, the most intimate secret of his humanity, is his capacity to love. We see this in Africanus' insistence that the reality of love is to be judged by its power to help man get beyond himself. But recognizing the impossibility of an immediate transcendence to Love itself, the poet Chaucer posits a hierarchy of love which maintains love in a small way is good, yet it is much better to love in a large way. In conjunction with some critics' penchant to polarize the Parliament's different types of love, calling them "contrasting pairs" or "the dualism of love," we
have also noted that these antitheses only have validity when they are considered as absolute good and evil or as terminal ends in themselves. In fact, Chaucer's final contention appears to be that sensuous love and love of common profit are indissolubly linked, unless sensuous love is purely negative. As long as love has some tendency towards common betterment, it cannot be condemned to utter darkness. Keeping these concluding remarks in mind, we are ready to turn our attention to the second and third divisions of the poem.
Chapter III. The Garden of Love

For those familiar with poetic descriptions of medi­eval love-gardens, the rapturous scene which greets the dreamer after Africanus' hardy push may still come as a mild surprise. The arresting timelessness of the May garden, bedecked in flourishing greenness and wafted by inaudible breezes, is always an exhilarating experience, and the stately majesty of noble trees, alive with the gentle antics of small animals, has all the stimulating freshness of an earthly paradise. But what particularly strikes our attention, setting this garden apart from somewhat similar depictions in the Purgatorio, the Roman de la Rose, and the Teseida, is Chaucer's emphatic insistence on the scale of creation.¹ With meticulous care the

¹See F. N. Robinson's explanatory note, The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, p. 794. Chaucer's imitation of the garden passages from the Teseida, VII, 51-53, is not as close as commentators generally suppose:

1. Chaucer repeatedly emphasizes the greenness of the garden; Boccaccio once mentions the verdissimo of the ripe plants;
poet enumerates the natural details of the garden to bring out the wonderful plenty of this Great Chain: the variegated flowers, the magnificent trees, the warbling birds, the red-finned fish, the "bestes smale of gentil kynde" (l. 196).

And as if to allay any suspicions that all this is not part of a larger cosmic ordering, nature's vast panoply is filled with an instrumental harmony which mirrors the planetary spheres in the variety of their motions. At the apex of this hierarchy of creatures is God, "that makere is of al and lord" (l. 199), who, it should be noted, partakes of the "ravyshyng swetnesse" of the earthly accompaniment.

Accordingly, the Supreme Being is both the cause and object of the descending and ascending activity of the chain, for God shares in the glory of his creation even as He provi-

2. Chaucer takes special notice of the trees, even cataloguing many of their attributes; Boccaccio refers only to the myrtle, which seems to abound more than the other trees;

3. Chaucer's landscape has more natural detail and color than Boccaccio's;

4. The singing of Chaucer's birds is clearly a reflection of the angelic harmony of the universe; in Boccaccio the music proceeds from Venus' temple;

5. Chaucer attributes the universal harmony of the garden to God; Boccaccio makes no mention of God.

The changes Chaucer makes insure a favorable response to the park of paradise. Later he will use the same techniques to depict the temple of Venus unfavorably. Translation of the relevant passages from the Teseida are printed in W. W. Skeat's Oxford Chaucer, I, 68-73, and Derek S. Brewer, ed., The Parlement of Foulys (London, 1960), pp. 138-40.
dentially draws everything to Himself.

This divine activity also accounts for another salient aspect of the opening garden scene, the perfect and orderly arrangement of its constituent parts:

Th' air of that place so attempre was
That nevere was ther grevaunce of hot ne cold;
There wex ek every holsom spice and gras;
No man may there waxe sek ne old;
Yit was there joye more a thousandfold
Than man can telle; ne nevere wolde it nyghte,
But ay cler day to any manes syghte. ²

(11. 204-10)

The finely tempered harmony which pervades and transforms the landscape into an ecstatic experience does not originate in a heavenly dispensation from the unrelenting laws of nature but in a greater compliance with these laws.

For a better understanding of this point let us turn to Chaucer's translation of Boethius' Consolation and a passage that lauds the concord of the universe:

Yif thou, wys, wilt demen in thi pure thought the ryghtes or the lawes of the heye thondrere (that is to seyn, of God), loke thou and byhoold the heightes of the sovereyn hevene. Ther kepin the sterres, be ryghtful alliaunce of thinges, hir oolde pees. The sonne, imoed by his rody fyr, ne distorbeth nat the colde cercle of the mone. . . . And thus maketh Love entrechaungerable the perdurable courses; and thus is discordable bataile yput out of the contre of the sterres. This accordaunce atempryth by evenelyke maneris the elementz, that the moiste thingis, stryvynge with the drye thingis, yeven place by stoundes; and that the colde thingis joynen hem by feyth to the hote thingis; and that the lyghte fyr ariseth into heighte, and the hevy erthes avalen by her weyghtes. By thise same causes the floury yer yeldeth swote smelles in the first somer sesoun warmynge; and the hote somer dryeth the cornes; and autumpne comith ayein hevy of apples; and the fleyng reyn bydeweth the wynter.

(IV, m.6, 1-34)

The orderliness and regularity of Boethius' cosmological scenario result from the interaction of two forces: nature (the determinant) and divine love (the determiner). Nature, closely allied to what Thomas Aquinas terms quidditas, is the determinant which causes every distinct species of being, inanimate or animate, to possess certain clearly defined powers and potencies. If it were not for the delimiting agency of divine love, each class of creation would impinge on the operational prerogatives of others, and the effect of this mass usurpation would be chaos on a universal scale. Elemental warfare is not the case simply because God in His love has endowed all objects with an unchanging essence or nature according to which they
must always act. It is for this precise reason that the first glimpse of the Garden of Love is characterized by beauty, joy, peace, and stability. Natural creation is carrying out the mandates of Love, directives which circulate unceasingly through the cosmos.

In a sense the garden is "magical" or an "oddity," since we, as well as the dreamer, are unaccustomed to the sight of everything functioning in agreement with its nature. This is due to the fact that a prodigious portion of the world is colored by capricious human behavior which, more often than not, is in direct violation of man's fundamental nature. Critics of the poem have generally conceded that the assembly of birds represents universal types of men, but this may also be true of the park of paradise. If it is, Chaucer is saying that as long as man continues to be wayward in his obligations to himself, and until he learns to maintain the correct equilibrium between the higher and lower elements of his being, the concord holding the material universe together will be absent from his life, and he will not enjoy the supersensible felicity of the garden. Other aspects of this paradisiacal enclosure would seem to sustain this conclusion. For instance, Chaucer takes great care in making the garden more spiritual (the heavenly music, ll. 197-203) and more earthly (the
scampering animals, ll. 192-96).\(^3\) This delicate balance may be regarded as a reflection of the harmony which the poet believes is necessary between the two quintessential components, rationality and animality, of man's nature.

In this matter attention should likewise be paid to the catalogue of trees:

The byldere ok, and ek the hardy asshe;
The piler elm, the cofre unto carayne;
The boxtre pipere, holm to whippes lashe;
The saylynge fyr; the cipresse, deth to playne;
The shetere ew; the asp for shaftes pleyne;
The olyve of pes, and eke the dronke vyne;
The victor palm, the laurer to devyne.

(11. 176-88)

Although a number of scholars have stressed the anthropomorphic qualities of the trees, they have ignored attributing the usefulness of each to the harmony implicit in its basic nature. It is because each tree is propelled to act in a certain definite manner as a consequence of a natural predisposition that it performs invaluable and beneficial service for man. This can very well be another of Chaucer's ironies, for instead of man's more rational nature establishing control over itself and over lower creation, the opposite is often true. Paradoxically, man has to be shown how to harmonize his erring nature by

\(^3\)C. S. Lewis in The Allegory of Love (1936; 10th rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 176, makes this observation, but he does not associate this harmony with \textit{amor naturalis}. 
creatures inferior to him on the Chain of Being. Hence, once more we are led to the conclusion that man's disorientation away from the universal objective of common betterment has its source in his freedom to make light of, totally or partially, the unifying power of divine love, the all-determining sovereignty natural creation must obey.

These observations strongly suggest that one of Chaucer's primary purposes for inserting the luxuriant description of the Garden of Love is to bespeak what can happen to man in a positive way if he keeps his nature in balance. Then when the persona enters the delightful garden paradise, he begins in some sense to participate in the condition man enjoyed before the Fall, and so the dreamer's initial consternation derives not only from the forceful treatment he receives from Scipio Africanus but also from the shocking, unexpected awareness that the perpetual May he sees materializing before him is a reflection of Beauty as it exists in God. If we seek further justification for Chaucer's leaving Africanus behind at the gate, it is to be found in the conflict arising from the sage's one-sided philosophy of love and the poet's claim for a love encompassing countless gradations of perfection. To be sure, the stoic's doctrine does not permit the amor naturalis presented in this initial scene, since Africanus' percep-
tive but narrow-minded point of view has no place for the natural spontaneity and the fecundity everywhere vivifying the landscape. Furthermore, there is an irony here. The old stoic promises to reward the dreamer with "mater of to wryte," but his own inflexible stance prevents him from learning more about the mysteries of love. In his blind foolishness Africanus believes he knows all the answers, which certainly is a wrongheaded opinion, as Chaucer points out through the wonderful May garden and the encouragement it offers.

The truth, however, cannot be gainsaid. Too many men, too often, have surrendered themselves absolutely to the insistent urges of the flesh and have been unable to achieve even a smattering of the harmonious state of love mirrored in nature. Thus it is that in the next twelve stanzas (11. 211-94), as the dreamer guides us through the domain of the goddess Venus, Chaucer attempts to delineate just what forces are at work corrupting man's nature, the moral value of these forces, and where they position man on the hierarchy of love. As in the last chapter there exists the danger of overemphasizing the philosophico-religious synthesis pervading the Parliament, but that the poem was intended to have this import can be seen in the fact that several of its manuscripts label it a trac-
No doubt Chaucer means for his temple of Venus to be taken in a fairly lighthearted spirit, yet an appreciation of his humor does not preclude examining it with a vigor for philosophic-religious suggestions. Furthermore, nothing should deter the reader from looking beneath the surface fiction for allegorical meaning that would accord with these suggestions. There is, moreover, ample precedent for this kind of approach to the temple of Venus in the studies of Donald C. Baker, J. A. W. Bennett, and D. W. Robertson, Jr. But the chief problem, since much of what is presented in the temple and its environs derives straight from Boccaccio's Teseida, is to show that Chaucer's allegory is intentional, that he is not slavishly following his source, but that he judiciously borrows those ideas which will further his own purpose. Lastly, although

4 According to Robert M. Lumiansky, "Chaucer's Parlement of Foules: A Philosophical Interpretation," Review of English Studies, 24 (1948), 89, the colophon for the Parliament in three of the fourteen manuscripts in which the poem has been preserved reads, "Explicit tractatus de congregacione volucrum die Sancti Valentini, etc." It seems some others considered the poem a philosophical "treatise." Also see Robinson, The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, p. 903, n. 697.

these several passages contain most of the figures associated with courtly love gardens, it is a mistake to regard Chaucer’s comments as only pertinent to purely traditional courtly romance. His intention is to view all love directly connected with Venus unfavorably. ⁶

As soon as we move into the first few lines (ll. 211-17), we become aware of a sudden change in atmosphere. In sharp contrast with the fruition and naturalness of the previous scene, we come upon the allegorical figure of Cupid, the famed minion of inordinate love, described by Alanus de Insulis in *De Planctu Naturae* as he who "instils poison, and finishes best things with an evil end. Attracting he seduces, laughing he jeers, with smarting ointment he anoints, laying hold he corrupts, loving he hates." ⁷

Sitting with him, beneath a tree that stands in proximity to a well, is "Wille, his daughter." In the *Teseida* (VII, st. 54) the two figures are seated "among the bushes beside a fountain," which fact according to Gertrude Jobes' dictionary of mythology has no symbolic import, but it does

⁶See Rhoda H. Selvin's, "Shades of Love in the *Parlement of Foules*," *Studia Neophilologica*, 37 (1965), 146-60, in which she argues that Chaucer deplores courtly love.

⁷All quotations are from Douglas M. Moffat, trans., *The Complaint of Nature by Alain de Lille* (New Haven, 1908)—hereafter cited as *Complaint*. 
note that the "tre" and the "welle" are common symbols for the union of male and female. Thus Chaucer's substitution indicates unequivocally that the arrows which are being forged and tempered by the two, contrary to what the nonchalant tone of the dreamer suggests, are destined to wound and to slay men and women in serious love combats. This reading gains moral significance if Robert A. Pratt's evidence for an interpretation of "Wille" in the sense of *voluntas* is accepted, (which, it might be added, is the sense on which Robertson and Huppe base their argument) since according to the Thomistic synthesis the passions of the sensitive appetite can influence the will because it desires the good as such (*bonum sub communi ratione boni*):

The will is moved by its object, inasmuch as, namely, man through being disposed in such and such a way by a passion, judges something to be fitting and good, which he would not judge thus were it not for the passion. Now this influence of a passion on man occurs in two ways. First, so that his reason is wholly bound, so that he has not the use of reason, as happens in those who through violent access of anger or concupiscence become furious or insane, just as they may from some other bodily

---


9 "Conjectures Regarding Chaucer's Manuscript of the *Teseida*," *Studies in Philology*, 42 (1945), 745-63; Robertson, pp. 115-16.
disorder; for passions of this kind do not take place without some change in the body.
(S.T., I-II, q.4, a.3)

To the extent, therefore, that passion holds sway over the will in the choice of apparent good, the will is controlled by reason.

Whether Chaucer had firsthand and immediate knowledge of this doctrine can be found in the De Planctu Naturae.

Dame Nature is rather clear concerning the matter:

I do not deny the essential nature of love honorableness if it is checked by the bridle of moderation, if it is restrained by the reins of sobriety, if it does not transgress the determined boundaries of the dual activity, or its heat boil to too great a degree. But if its spark shoots into a flame, or its little spring rises to a torrent, the rankness of the growth demands the pruning-knife, and the swelling and excess requires an assuaging medicine; for all excess disturbs the progress of well-regulated temperance, and the pride of unhealthy extravagance fattens, so to speak, into imposthumes of vices. (P.5, 13-24)

Here Nature is attempting to teach man that the Lethean cup of sensuality is drunk when reason slumbers and the will is in absolute control (P.4, 275-76). This tenet underlies the meaning of the present allegory. "Wille," acting at the behest of and in conjunction with the amatory designs of Cupid, not under the aegis of the higher and more rational guidelines of reason, represents the will of man totally subservient to the dictates of sensual love.
"Wille," filing arrows (sign of the conflict between the sexes in love) to give them greater effectiveness "To wounde and kerve," works to glorify love (amor sensitivus) as an end in itself. Likewise, as long as man allows his will to be coerced by passion and seeks to exult in love as a terminal end, his conduct continues to be illicit and morally reprehensible. In making his point Chaucer has improved the corresponding passage from the Teseida. Boccaccio has Ease and Memory putting heads of iron on the arrows, but Chaucer's elimination of these two stock figures from courtly love allegory allows him to focus more deliberately on his own allegory of the will. It should also be noted that this single stanza bears out the foregoing statement that Chaucer is not necessarily critical of courtly love per se but that all love of this variety is spurious and devoid of moral value.

The utilization Chaucer makes of the highly artificial personifications of the next several stanzas does credit to his sense of planned movement. Adopting the figures associated with courtly love allegory, the poet appears to be supporting the contention of Aquinas that violent passion provokes a concomitant change in the body. I do not argue that Chaucer explicitly adheres to Thomas' presentation of psychological phenomenon but, as Walter C.
Curry's study of medieval science exemplifies, that he is well aware of this concept. In addition, the change the dreamer describes is not physiological but behavioral. Whenever his will is commandeered by excessive carnal love, man suffers a serious alteration of behavior. He applies himself more thoroughly to those external adjuncts which will elicit satiation of his desires. Desyr is no longer moderate but violently inclined to licentiousness. Plesaunce stands for the fleshly pleasures which the passion-ridden will pursues so unflaggingly that the quest, in and for itself, becomes a habitual way of life. Lust, the unrestrained gratification of sexual appetite, is the principal means of satisfying the will's new, debauched attitude towards pleasure, while Delyt in that which is appealing to the sense faculties and Beute, that which is sensuously attractive to the eye, are secondary forms of appeasement. Foolhardynesse refers to the thoughtlessly bold way in which man flies after these inordinate pleasures at the risk of his soul.

Special notice should be taken of Craft's dissimulation:

10 Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences (New York, 1926), pp. 3-26.

11 Bennett, p. 88, warns the reader about giving the term Lust its modern meaning. However, Robertson, pp. 116-18, fails to make this distinction.
And of the Craft that can and hath the myght
To don by force a wyght to don folye--
Disfigurat was she, I nyl nat lye.

In order to allure unsuspecting victims, the man of perverse will conceals his true nature by exhibiting misleading mannerisms and personality traits. The important point is that he senses the change occasioned by his inflamed passions and is very conscious of his need to be deceptive. It is hardly surprising that the dreamer mentions Aray and Curteysie among the gallery of personifications because seductive attire and feigned politeness are indispensable accouterments in the game of amorous deceit. These figures are complemented by Flaterye, manufacturer of adulation and falsehood, and by Gentilesse, highbreeding cultivated for the purpose of seduction, such as we find in the lusty squire of The Wife of Bath's Tale.

To secure the inveiglement of the unwary, the seeker of inordinate sexual pleasures avails himself of the services of Messagerye, the sender of entrapping love letters, and Meede, the rewarder or the briber of dishonor. With the exception of the solitary oak under which Delyt stands, the entire scene is destitute of natural life. In fact, the unproductiveness of Delyt's oak, when it is compared with the usefulness of the "byldere ok" of the catalogue, is
all the more startling. The oak, a well-established symbol for strength and endurance, named by Spenser as the "sole king of the forrests all," seems to suffer emasculation by being set amidst these allegorical creations. In the catalogue Chaucer's enumeration of the various trees is not superfluous because the list is in agreement with the order, purposefulness, and beauty of the park. Similarly, Delyt's oak is not as ill-placed as some commentators believe, since the absence of the qualifying adjective "byldere" only serves to improve and illustrate the allegory. In addition, Chaucer is not following the Teseida in placing the oak in the allegorical garden, for Boccaccio omits it from his narrative. This consideration makes it more probable that Chaucer intends this contrast.

There is still another relevant observation. In the description of the paradisiacal garden we are enchanted with the all-pervading greenness: "of colour fresh and greene/As emeraude, that joye was to seene" (ll. 174-75). This verdancy is symbolic of the garden itself, that is, the spiritual fruitfulness which results from maintaining one's nature in balance. Conversely when Chaucer launches into his elaboration of the allegorical figures, as if to confirm

12 The Faerie Queene, I, i, 8.8.
their sterility, there is no mention of viridity. Only the
man-made temple of Venus, supported by massive pillars of
jasper, has any association with green, but the green of
the pillars is lifeless and ornamental, without a sign of
productivity. The reason for the contrast between the real
and the factitious is plain. Chaucer's intention is to
produce a picture which should do justice both to amor
naturalis and to amor sensitivus, to show the relative
moral import of each without patently affirming or con­
demning. This approach is similar to the use Chaucer makes
of his persona. By demonstrating subtly that something is
right or wrong with his depictions, Chaucer lets the effects
of virtue and vice speak for themselves, and instead of
being rigidly righteous he takes advantage of this device
to retain identity with his audience. There is the possi­
bility that Alanus de Insulis' De Planctu Naturae furnished
Chaucer with this humanistic attitude towards man. Com­
menting on her delineation of Cupid, Nature avers, "it is
not strange if in this portrayal of Cupid I intersperse
slight signs of blame, although he is allied to me by the
connection of own blood-relationship" (P.5, 4-7). The
obligation Nature feels to warn man of Cupid's duplicity
is not overridden by affinity, but simultaneously this kin­
ship prevents her from castigating the god too harshly.
Also, this would appear to explain Chaucer's use of allegory.

Chaucer continues to insinuate the suggestion of barrenness and sin in characterizing the temple proper. Made of brass, this imposing edifice is "ifounded stronge," no doubt from the love of corporeal pleasures. Brass, as we ascertain from Boccaccio's notes on the *Teseida* and from Chaucer's *House of Fame*, is the alloy most frequently associated with Venus and is representative of shamelessness, the "brazen" disregard for modesty. Boccaccio's temple, however, is made of copper, the metal usually symbolic of Venus. In using brass to face the temple's facade, Chaucer may be reminded of Alain de Lille's observation on the regal diadem of Nature: "no base alloy of gold, derogate from high worth, and deceptive to the eye with false light, supplied its substance, but the pure nobility of gold itself" (*Complaint*, P.1, 59-61). The other, less noble crown belongs to Venus. Additionally then, Chaucer may be commenting on Venus' baseness in offering false love to her resolute followers. The women, some fair and some gay, always dancing around the temple in disheveled attire, therefore typify the wanton women who betray man into false

---

13 See Bennett, p. 90, n. 1, for further comment on the distinction between copper and brass.
and demoralizing love. St. Augustine would have said of these women that they use what ought to be enjoyed and enjoy what ought to be used; that is, instead of using love for the service of others and finding joy in the acts of altruism, these women, while reveling in their illicit enjoyments, use love for their own private interest. Many a hundred pair of doves roost on the temple. From classical times doves were proclaimed as the birds particularly acceptable to Venus. They sometimes drew her ivory chariot and were the sacrificial offering when forlorn Roman lovers had to placate the caprice of Venus. Alanus de Insulis describes the dove on Nature's seamless garment as drunk with the sweet Dionean evil, laboring at the sport of Cypris (Complaint, P.1, 255-56). Appropriately the doves symbolize amorous desire, the numerous exertions which sensual love demands of the voluptuary.14

At the threshold of the temple sits Dame "Pees" holding in her hand a curtain, which she, like Peace in the Teseida, may use to veil the temple door, and which may signify the concealment of certain aspects of truth, so that the type of

---

peace she represents is not true peace but rather a ludicrous distortion of it. It is important, then, to distinguish between true and false peace:

Peace gives calm and unity to the appetite. Now just as the appetite may tend to what is good absolutely, or to what is good apparently, so too, peace may be either true or apparent. There can be no true peace except where the appetite is directed to what is truly good, since every evil, though it may appear good in a way, so as to calm the appetite in some respect, has, nevertheless many defects, which cause the appetite to remain restless and disturbed. Hence true peace is only in good men and about good things. The peace of the wicked is not true peace but a semblance of peace.

(S.T., II-II, Q.29, a.2)

The sober calmness of Dame Peace is the self-deceiving, exterior imperturbability characteristic of the sensualist who is momentarily free from the pricks of conscience because he is too lethargic after his lustful revel to be aware of his turpitude. The peace he experiences is not that of the just man who has directed his energies toward common profit. Next to Peace, Patience is sitting on a hill of sand, evidently symbolizing the insecure foundation upon which a life of steadfast dedication to Venus is built. Her pallor is indicative of the spiritual sterility fostered by her way of life. Finally Byheste and Art, standing just inside and just outside the temple door with their "folk a route," are another reminder of the surreptitiousness necessary to succeed at lechery.
So far in the narrator's journey through the garden we have seen a gradual change in atmosphere, especially apparent in the transition from the lush beauty of the May park to the counterfeit beauty of the allegorical figures. With our guide's entrance into the temple, we encounter an even greater alteration in the prevailing mood of this section:

Withinne the temple, of sykes hoote as fyr
I herde a swogh that gan aboute renne,
Whiche sikes were engendered with desyr,
That maden every au ter for to brenne
Of newe flaume, and wel espyed I thenne
That al the cause of sorwes that they drye
Cam of the bittere goddesse Jelosye.

(11. 246-52)

There is no mistaking the frank espousal of grossly sexual immorality, which earlier had been masked in allegorical allusion. The vivid sensuousness of the images causes Bennett to regard the stanza as "sultry," "sinister," and "voluptuous," and Robertson to feel "disquietude," as if he were attending a pagan love-ritual. Also we are more emphatically aware of the loss of innocence; fiery sighs of worshipers supplant the temperate breezes of the park, and the new flame of unfulfilled desire, a poor substitute for the fruitful sunshine of the garden, burns on many altars. Though at this time nothing is said about the

15 Ibid., p. 91, and Robertson, p. 120.
lighting of the temple, we have the impression, owing to the luminosity of the tapers and the repetition of words dealing with fire, that the temple is somewhat shrouded in darkness. Besides the shift from natural to artificial which runs through the garden section of the Parliament, there is another downward movement from light to darkness. In order to appreciate the significance of this, we must recall some previous considerations.

It is in the striking fourteenth chapter of the *Commentary* that Macrobius describes the emanative process as a transmission of light from an infinite source. His proposition in essence states that as the different creatures on the descending chain of being receive the divine light, their ability to mirror the infinite in some finite mode becomes less and less. In short, the intensity of light reflected by a work of creation is equivalent to its degree of perfection. Furthermore, light and beauty are synonymous terms, as is evident in medieval speculation on the nature of beauty. But how does this doctrine apply here? The function of beauty in the garden paradise is twofold, namely, to show the wonderful consequences of keeping human nature in equilibrium and to declare the omnipotence of God

---

through the magnitude and beauty of His creation. If the garden's flourishing greenness is evidence of the amount of sunlight (the infinite light of God) shed on it, it is likewise a manifestation of the rank the garden holds in God's creation. In other words, the garden is clearly favored by God. The absence of natural detail is an indication that the essential light of God does not fall plenteously on the allegorical personifications. There is some light, however, as we know from the growth of Delyt's oak and from the pallor of Dame Pacience. Since these figures are obviously further distant from the primal light source, their imperfection is correspondingly greater.

Once we set foot inside the temple of Venus, there is a general lack of light; only the steady fires of concupiscence illuminate this shadowy world. The descent from light to darkness climaxes fittingly with Venus, who lounges "in a prive corner" and in a place which is dark. So it is that the hierarchy of light works in reverse, and for that reason it neither marks the culmination of the ascent to God nor the acquisition of a unique state of being, one which is wholly ordered, beautiful, and good. Rather this ladder aids Chaucer in imaginatively presenting his thesis that all passionate love, not just certain types of courtly love, which is confined to darkness (love as a terminal end)
is not productive of eternal good. At the same time, the light-dark imagery neatly correlates with the golden letters, which beckon man to the quest for love, and the black ones, which warn him to guard against self-indulgence.

There is something comic about worshipers who put up with the bitterness of Jelosye and whose sighs fill the temple with a continuous noise, but nothing is more ridiculous than the immediate object of their adoration:

The god Priapus saw I, as I wente,
Withinne the temple in sovereyn place stonde,
In swich aray as whan the asse hym shente
With cri by nighte, and with hys sceptre in honde.  

(11. 253-56)

Traditionally the god is pictured as naked, with a distorted countenance and disheveled hair crowned with garden herbs. The only beast offered to him is the ass because as Priapus was going to violate the chastity of Vesta, who was asleep, Silenus' asses brayed, waking up the goddess and preventing further mischief. Since the narrator makes sufficient allusion to the grotesqueness of this legend, MacDonald's observation that Priapic love "represents love and fertility at its most natural" hardly appears justified. "Natural" is the wrong choice of word, for it is too easily confused with the "natural" fecundity pictured in the paradisiacal park, which does not connote baseness. The god,
instead of being set up in a fertile garden as was the custom, is confined to the dark interior of the temple because Priapus symbolizes a heinous type of naked and absolutely lustful love, a love so distorting to the moral sense of the lover that he hardens in his sin and becomes, by his own failure to turn his eyes upward towards the light, a child of Satan. Such are those busy men who idolatrously pay homage to the god with their garlands of fresh flowers. The final irony, of course, is that those fair fresh groves of flowers, part of nature's balance, should be used to signify man's imbalance and waywardness.

At the bottom of this hierarchy of light, close to the hypothetic negative pole of unilluminated darkness, can be found "Venus and hir porter Richesse." During the Middle Ages this Venus, to distinguish her from Cytherea, was designated as terrestrial or infernal. Some of her common appellations were "the shameful Venus, the goddess of sensuality," and "concupiscence of the flesh, which is the mother of all fornication"; John Duns Scotus attributes man's original sin to her, and Boccaccio moralizes on her in his notes to the Teseida. In general, the Middle Ages was not niggardly in its vituperation of the sexual misde-

meanors of this earthly goddess. Chaucer, who in the Par-
liament relies to some extent on Boccaccio's portrait of
Venus, is no exception, but as several commentators have
remarked, he tones down the provocativeness of the borrow-
ings from the Teseida. MacDonald presents the best summary
of these major changes:

1. Boccaccio dwells on Venus' beauty; Chaucer does
   not mention it;
2. Boccaccio discovers her virtually naked in bed;
   Chaucer focuses on the bed;
3. Boccaccio gives her loose golden hair; Chaucer
   binds it with a band;
4. Chaucer does not dwell on the beauty of her face
   as does Boccaccio;
5. nor does he mention the beauty of her arms, her
   bosom, or the apple of her breasts as does the
   Italian;
6. in Chaucer she is satisfactorily covered; while
   in Boccaccio it is as if she had nothing on;
7. Chaucer transfers the fragrance which Boccaccio
   has assigned to her person to the temple itself;
8. Boccaccio dwells on the apple and the victory
   over Pallas and Hera in the valley of Ida which
   Chaucer omits;
9. Chaucer wholly invents the phrase with which he
   dismisses her. 19

Although Chaucer sought to mollify the seductive charms
of Venus, he describes enough of them to explain why men
like Palamon do not have to be prodded into promising to
"holden werre alwey with chastitee."  20 For instance, Venus'

19 Loc. cit.
20 The Knight's Tale, I (A) 2236.
breasts are naked and the rest of her body is covered only with "a subtyl coverchef of Valence." If Chaucer's intention had been to give unqualified praise to the goddess, he could have depicted her, as he did the statue of Venus in the Knight's Tale, surrounded with "alle the circumstances of Love" and with the power to put wisdom, wealth, strength, and cunning to shame. But this is not his purpose. To begin with, Chaucer's revelation of some of Venus' enticements evinces an empathy for fallen man; it shows that he understands the many erotic temptations drawing man to unordered sexuality. This implied relationship between Chaucer and "everyman" also accounts for the fact that he is neither noticeably adverse to nor condemnatory of the base, self-oriented love that the goddess stands for. He is content to gibe at her through her vassals--Richesse, Bacchus, and Ceres--who typify forms of greed and gluttony. On the other hand, by minimizing Venus' attractiveness the poet avoids complimenting her in a portrait which is flattering and overly sensuous, and confusing her with the celestial Venus (Cytherea), whom Ovid describes in Fasti IV as the "cosmic force which governs the earth, the sea, and the heavens, causes plants and ani-

\[21\] Ibid., I (A) 1918-66.
mals to perpetuate their species, and inspires the arts among men."22 As suggested earlier, Chaucer is a glorifier of this Venus because she epitomizes God-directed love rather than self-directed love. Finally, it is MacDonald's contention that Chaucer does not paint a far richer picture of the goddess since he wishes to focus on her barrenness.23

The two "yonge folk," zealously beseeching help from the goddess, provide a good example of the ridiculousness of self-directed love. Their plight is touched with humor, not only because they are unable to relax the intensity of their passion, but also because there is something distinctively comic about an egoistic love that seeks self-aggrandizement on bent knee before a reclining goddess. Yet the real trouble with their kind of love is that it retains too many traits of specific individuals, and so it cannot fulfill its proper function. A blind love, such as we meet here, is inconsistent with Scipio Africanus' admonition to pursue common profit. Since this self-centered love is the antithesis of universal betterment, it is lowest on a hierarchy which is favorable rather to abstraction from individuals

22 See 11. 85-132.
23 MacDonald, p. 282.
and to admiration of qualities. Whether directed at a
goddess or a beautiful body, worship of individuals is
wrong. That is why the dreamer, when he leaves Venus and
her young venerated with the words, "thus I let hire lye,"
is obviously dissatisfied. Therefore later in the Parliament, we are not surprised to find that the three formal
eagles, while being defined individuals, represent abstract
qualities in vowing eternal fidelity. There is no contra-
diction here since the qualities of these birds may be
found in many individuals. As Brewer comments, "there is
no indication that their love is against Nature's law, or
that it is in any way guilty or immoral." But this is
the case against the young folk, for too much subjection
to the barren and selfish sensuality of Venus has overpow-
ered their imagination and has made self-expression impos-
sible. To treat another as a lover means to respect her
and to accept her as herself, to be ready to delight in her
as a unique person. In short, for love to have genuine
meaning, passion must be mastered to the extent that the
other person be considered an equal in the amatory rela-
tionship.

After the dreamer's slighting of Venus, he goes fur-

24Brewer, p. 22.
ther into the temple where he spies many broken bows hanging on the walls, trophies of Venus' innumerable victories over the followers of "Dyane the chaste." The walls are also lined with painted stories applauding some of the goddess' outstanding successes against chastity:

of Calyxté and Athalante,
And many a maid of which the name I wante.
Semyramis, Candace, and Hercules,
Biblis, Dido, Thisbe, and Piramus,
Tristram, Isoude, Paris, and Achilles,
Eleyne, Cleopatre, and Troylus,
Silla, and ek the moder of Romulus:
Alle these were peynted on that other syde,
And al here love, and in what plyt they dye.

(11. 286-94)

Though certain critics look upon this list of lovers as just a happy combination of stanzas from the Teseida and the Inferno, closer examination shows Chaucer adroitly using it for his own purpose. For example, by setting apart the reference to Callisto and Atalanta from the passionate lovers of the next stanza, Chaucer mitigates their culpability and indicates gradations of disorder according to the degree of sensual enslavement. As Ovid narrates in the Metamorphoses, Callisto sinned with Jove only after the omnipotence of the god overwhelmed her girlish might.

26 II, 401-65.
And Atalanta, mother of Parthenopaeus, did not return the faithful love of the beautiful Milanion until he had persistently suffered and struggled for her. Their abandonment of Diana for Venus was strongly coerced.

In the second stanza the figures famous for love seem to be brought together without discrimination: the lewd and the unprincipled, and those who have felt love to be a passion for only one person. More thorough reading, however, discloses that the adultery or lust of most of the lovers is a major impediment to common profit. Semiramis, who, to lessen the blot of her own lasciviousness, decreed a law which permitted her subjects to do as they pleased in sexual conduct. Concerning her notorious behavior Boccaccio in his treatise, De Claris Mulieribus, says: "With one wicked sin this woman stained all these accomplishments worthy of perpetual memory." To vindicate her conduct Semiramis led the Assyrians into moral subjugation, not the general harmony of the commonweal. The same is true of Hercules, whom the medieval world regarded as the most perfect model of virtue because he exposed himself to all kinds of dangers for the good of mankind. His efforts for the common good ended untimely when Deianira began to

mistrust her husband's fidelity and sent him to an agoniz­
ing death. From the House of Fame we are already familiar
with Dido, queen of Carthage, who forsook her duty to her
citizens and made Aeneas "hyr lyf, hir love, hir lust, hir
lord" (l. 258). The tragedy of Pyramus and Thisbe usually
served the Middle Ages as a moving illustration of the impet­
uousity of youthful love. Moralizing on the misfortune of
the two lovers, Boccaccio offers an interesting observa­
tion:

Certainly, the ardor of the young should be curb­
ed slowly, lest by wishing to oppose them with
sudden impediments we drive them to despair and
perdition. The passion of desire is without tem­
perance, and it is almost a pestilence and fury
in youth. We should tolerate it patiently, be­
cause, the nature of things being as it is, when
we are fully grown we are spontaneously inclined
to bring forth children, so that the human race
may not come to an end through delaying inter­
course until old age. 28

The preservation of the human species enjoins control of
sexual ardor in the young. This, of course, could be a
point of view with which Chaucer was acquainted. 29 Surely
one of the preponderant factors explaining the impermanence
of the love just described is the inability to go beyond

28 Ibid., p. 27.

29 Since Boccaccio's De Claris Mulieribus was written
and revised over a period of years, from 1355 to at least
1359, it is plausible that Chaucer may have been familiar
with the work.
the self and direct love toward the good of others, which step must be taken according to the hierarchy of values put forth in the poem.

Chaucer has a notable emendation in the roll call of lovers that he borrows from the fifth canto of the *Inferno*:

> Then the self-slayer comes, the love-lorn queen who to Sichaeus' ashes broke her faith; and next, lascivious Cleopatra, seen With Helen, look for whom, while she drew breath, such ills were done and suffered: see the great Achilles, who in war with love met death. See Paris, Tristan, and a thousand yet, and still more, were the shades he pointed to, and named, whom love from life did separate.  

(11. 61-69)

Where we would expect to find Francesca and Paolo if Chaucer's catalogue contained only those who have trespassed for the sake of love, we see the poet's own Troilus being inserted. Francesca and her lover Paolo had no overriding obligation to the city-state of Florence even though it was torn apart with political unrest, but Troilus, as Robertson perceptively points out, was a public figure who especially in time of war had a considerable responsibility to Troy.  

30 Although his love for Criseyde was morally perilous, it carried an extra burden of guilt because Troilus neglected his civic duty. Chaucer was aware of this fact, for he has him confirm his obligations to the

state when talking to Pandarus in the fourth book of *Troilus and Criseyde*:

"First, syn thow woost this town hath al this werre
For ravysshyng of wommen so by myght,
It sholde nought be suffred me to erre,
As it stant now, ne don so gret unright.
I sholde han also blame of every wight,
My fadres graunt if that I so withstoode,
Syn she is chaunged for the townes goode."

(547-53)

Despite his concluding statement that reason counsels this way (574), Troilus, following Pandarus' advice, decides on elopement. Clearly then, the general welfare of the state is secondary. Cleopatra is another blameworthy of perfidy to the state. Having become a prostitute of kings, she sold her empire to the highest bidder of carnality. By her wantonness Helen aroused all Greece and Troy to a state of war, and she alone profited. To look at Tristram, Paris, and Achilles is to discover that the turbulence of passion led them to dereliction of the commonweal. At least this seems to be Chaucer's attitude in the last line of the stanza when the dreamer makes passing reference to the other side of the paintings on the wall. The phrase, "al here love," appears to be a slur against the followers of Venus, whose love is minimal. Rather than acting to help others to a fullness of life, they seek to use others and to sacrifice the general welfare. They persistently refuse
to recognize an authority outside of themselves, so that their sensual love cannot be elevated to a higher type.

This study of the *Parliament of Fowls* so far presents rather strong evidence suggesting that Chaucer has not lost Dante's vision of that "love which moves the sun and the other stars," and that, like Dante, he employs the hierarchy of love to put his point across. In the present chapter we have seen how the paradisiacal park could be representative of the peace and delight characterizing man's nature if he orders it, that is, if he maintains the proper harmony between his animal and rational parts. This must be done in order for man to gain the goal of common profit (*amor rationalis*), but the attainment of this end does not necessarily preclude sexual love. Sexual love, in accelerating man's desire to respect and to accept another as himself, is a licit step to the higher objective. On the other hand, the love of Venus dehumanizes man because of its total selfishness. To show this Chaucer set the immoral goddess at the nadir of a beam of light emanating from the Supreme Being. Flickering fires in a place of darkness far below God are readily associated with hell. This connection is one that Chaucer wants his audience to make since it is not only an adequate commentary on the severe moral dangers peculiar to this degree of love, but
also emblematic of the torturous route the absolutely libidinous man must follow to succeed constantly at sensual love. Further, although Chaucer couches his admonition of Venus in the trappings of courtly love, the tradition as such is not disparaged. The highly artificial allegorical figures contrast vividly with the natural vegetation and the frolicking animals of the May garden, and so they are meant to reveal the unproductiveness of ego-centered love. Also Chaucer minimizes the importance of Venus in her own temple. Her subordinates, especially Priapus, who is prominently placed in the inner temple, receive greater attention, and she is slighted by not being depicted as thoroughly sensuous. With Venus and what she symbolizes the descent is made to the lowest level of love. Accordingly the poet's hierarchical design is complete; the two extremes of amor rationalis and amor sensitivus are precisely balanced with amor naturalis.
Emerging from the dimly lighted interior of Venus' temple, the dreamer once again discovers himself in the garden of love, but now he is more conscious of being enveloped in a blaze of golden light. Unwittingly, he has arrived at the domus Naturae, and it is the sun-like beauty of the goddess Nature that shines through the garden making everything "so sote and grene" (l. 296). The dreamer is captivated by the radiant fairness of the queen, by a beauty greater than any of the stars, greater than that of all other creatures. On the surface the poet appears to be routinely adding more superlatives to Alanus de Insulis' glowing description of the goddess' features in the De Planctu Naturae:

Her hair, which shone not with borrowed light but with its own, and which displayed the likeness of rays, not by semblance, but by native clearness surpassing nature, showed on a starry body the head of a virgin. . . . And a golden comb smoothed into the dance of due orderliness the gold of her hair, and wondered to have found a countenance agreeing, for the gold of fancy imposed upon the vision the false conclu-
sion of harmonious color. . . . The glowing fire of her cheeks, kindled with the light of roses, with soft flame cheered her face; and this in turn chastened the pleasing warmth with cool whiteness—like rose color on fine linen. (P.1, 4-35)

But the profusion of light imagery that is found here and in the passages of the Parliament assigned to introduce Nature (ll. 295-322) has a more varied purpose than that of artistic coloring. It has been argued above that Chaucer employs a pattern of light-dark images to comment on the illicit sensuality symbolized by Venus, and since Nature is commonly recognized as the antithesis of the lascivious goddess, there is good reason for believing that here too Chaucer intentionally designed the contrast between darkness and light. More specifically, this concept explains why he places the dark couch of Venus "in a privy corner" (l. 260) and seats Nature in the open air amid a hill of flowers (l. 302), or why he has no special appellation for the goddess Venus (which fact was viewed by the Middle Ages as a slight to royal honor) but designates Nature as "noble emperesse, ful of grace" (l. 319). "Full of grace" not only recalls the phrase "gratia plena" from the Ave Maria, but it also has numerous associations with light, for example, the Holy Spirit shedding His light (grace) on man.
This contrast, however, is not of immediate relevance. It is more important to note that the luminous beauty of Nature, one which has the power to overcome and to solace the dreamer, is a flame of divine Love, a lesser light derived from the perfect vision Nature has of the Eternal Light. Although Nature's brilliance is deficient when compared with the divine Light, nevertheless it exceeds human illumination greatly. In the *De Planctu* Alanus de Insulis considers this hierarchical triad as the major source of light (power) in the universe, classifying the light of God as the superlative, that of Nature the comparative, and that of man the positive (P.3, 262-64). In short, Nature, much like Beatrice in the *Divine Comedy*, functions as a mediatrix between God and man. Then when Chaucer has his narrator declare Nature to be the "vicaire of the almyghty Lord" (l. 379), the poet, as his use of light imagery suggests, recognizes that she is more than a passive overseer of the cosmos. Nature has a vitally precise role in the cosmic schema since she is characterized by, has control of, and leads to whatever light represents, whether that be beauty, goodness, truth, or love:

"O offspring of God, mother of all things, bond and firm chain of the universe, jewel of earth, mirror to mortality, light-bringer of the world! Peace, love, virtue, government, power, order, law, end, way, light, source, life, glory, splen-
Thus Nature governs the order and beauty of the world, its hierarchy of perfections, and its scale of worth, and she accomplishes this by binding all creation with an unbreakable bond of love. In essence, Nature represents the power of love controlling the universe by authority of divine law.

In spite of her wide authority Nature's principal lament in the De Planctu is that all creation, with the very noticeable exception of man, is bound in willing subjection to her inviolable commands. As a result, her most serious responsibility is maintaining man on an unerring course so that he will eventually reach divine love. So without wonder we learn that Nature's paramount interests both in the De Planctu and in the Parliament are love and mankind (since the fowls after all do represent men). We are somewhat surprised, however, when Derek S. Brewer in his edition of the poem contends little attention should be paid to the presentation of Nature "weeping for the sins of man" that is contained in the treatise.¹ For if the major portion

of the *De Planctu* is omitted to concentrate on the general rejoicing at the approach of Nature in Prose One, an essential aspect of the concept underlying the personification of the heavenly goddess is disregarded. This does not mean that we have to read Alanus before enjoying Chaucer's *Parliament*, but we will be in less danger of underrating the serious part of Chaucer's purpose if we look at Alanus' *Nature* in greater detail. Further, to appreciate the total significance of the debate among the fowls, especially the efficacy of their love, and the goddess' disposition towards the issues disputed, there should be some assessment of Nature's character and outlook in the *De Planctu*, particularly her attitude towards Venus. For instance, it appears that if Nature were sharply hostile or condemnatory of Venus, she would not be patient with the selfish love which is discerned occasionally in the birds. A lack of understanding for any of the degrees of love would prejudice Nature, and in turn the reader, against the birds.

One of the first points which need clarification is Nature's evaluation of what Venus connotes. Although, as D. W. Robertson states, Alanus' *De Planctu Naturae* "is concerned with the conflict between Nature and the wrongful Venus," for the most part Nature handles their mutual
antagonism charitably. In explaining how Venus, originally her assistant, becomes corrupted, Nature says:

With these distinctive marks of splendor and nobility, the earthly presence of Venus came into thy native sphere. Most energetically she labored with the aid of her instruments in weaving the series of human birth, mending with a slender needle those parts that had been sundered by the hands of the Fates, and more subtly still joining these one to another. And thus did she once, with the most obedient care, perform to me the dues of her tributary administration. But since the soul, when glutted from its birth with a satiety of the same thing, comes to loathe it, and its desire to accomplish is extinguished by attack on the daily labor, the uniform character of the work so many times repeated tired and disgusted Cytherea, and the effect of continued labor took away the wish to perform. She... began to be young and childish over the joys of extreme idleness.... Venus, stung by these fatal passions, began as a concubine, defiling the chastity of her marriage-bed in the polluting sin of adultery against her husband Hymen, to commit fornication with Antigamus. (P.5, 186-215)

According to Nature's own testimony, then, Venus was not always the goddess of grossly sensual love. Charged with the task of populating the earth, Venus became tired of the monotony of her chore and sought release in excessive licentiousness. The crux of the matter is that Nature appointed and sanctioned the activity of Venus as long as it was directed towards the common good, namely, to marriage and to the begetting of children. Only when the earthly goddess

---

subverted the naturally good and licit sexual drive to her own selfish purposes, was she accused of participating in the lewd practices of lust and of suffering moral deformity. Unquestionably, Nature does not countenance Venus' later depravity, but the overall impression of Nature's statement is that her reprimand looks more to the heinousness of the sin than to the castigation of the sinner. At the same time Nature is not so engrossed by sin that she has no energy left with which to care for and to warn the creatures who commit it. Even while Nature's maternal feelings force her to acknowledge the fatal passions begun by Venus, she recounts for Man the fall of Venus so that he may "sympathize and condole over the ruin of desperate man, and, armed with the shield of early admonition, meet the monstrous force of vices" (P.5, 291-94). To be sure, Alanus' Nature is not an inexorable force ruthlessly authoritative in her censure of sinners. And Chaucer's Nature pays no less attention to the human requirements of the sinner, for she addresses the clamorous fowls in "esy voys" (1. 382), chides them to hold their tongues with "facound voys" (1. 521), and prefaces her judgment with "I preye" (1. 383).

This last point, best summed up in the old precept, "Hate the sin, not the sinner," merits further discussion if only to show that Nature's intolerance of sin does not
stem from a poor grasp of its essence, that even though an act is contrary to her decrees, she still has the capacity to understand it. As a matter of fact, Alanus' Nature is fully able to comprehend the quiddity of the more violent and intemperate sins:

For the human race, derogue from its high birth, commits monstrous acts in its union of genders, and perverts the rules of love by a practice of extreme and abnormal irregularity. Thus, too, man, become the tyro of distorted passion, turns the predicate into direct contraposition, against all rules. (P.4, 89-95)

Now my discourse has traced on the chart of thy mind the manner in which the ruinous evil of idleness has produced inordinate love; how the excess and deluge of drink has brought to pass love's raging lust; how, taking its rise in gluttony, the ivory-white leprosy of licentiousness has destroyed great numbers. (P.5, 268-73)

This Bacchilatria, who steals the spark of reason from her lover, and exposes him to the darkness of brutish sensuality, after the manner of a harlot so intoxicates him that he is forced to desire wine beyond measure; so much indeed, that the drinker, in being bound to Bacchus by the chain of intemperate enjoyment, is thought to exhibit the majesty of his cult. (P.6, 31-38)

Not only does Nature point out what are for her some sins far worse than average in their excessiveness, but here she also demonstrates an acute perception of human action and motivation. From her vantage point as vicar of the universe, Nature views man when he makes meaningful progress towards an attainable goal or when he overtly offers resistance to
the good of others and to that of the self by persistently overindulging fleshly appetites. To be without a corruptible body, hence without sin, does not signify that Nature is unacquainted with that which is foreign to the smooth functioning of the moral order. The perception of sin in man fails to impair Nature's all-encompassing vision. Precisely for this reason some modern critics err when they assert that the first tercel eagle, in refusing to "increase and multiply" in accordance with the divine command, seeks something contrary to his nature and something which Nature does not understand. This fact is easily proved by noting that Nature's voice is never added to the confused babble of discord in the Parliament. Furthermore, in the De Planctu Chastity, as well as Hymen, is a prominent figure in Nature's entourage. Thus Alanus points out that it is unnecessary for man to marry and have children in order to have an essential role in the divine plan. The noble

3 Loc. cit.

4 Dorothy Bethurum Loomis in "The Venus of Alanus de Insulis and the Venus of Chaucer," Philological Essays: Studies in Old and Middle English Language and Literature in Honour of Herbert Dean Meritt, ed. James L. Rosier (Paris, 1970), p. 186, states that the "De Planctu is an attack on celibacy as well as on lust," but she fails to take into account the significant role of Chastity in the treatise.
tercel, as long as his love is other-centered, which is
the case when he pleads to serve the formel eagle with "wil,
and herte, and thought" (ll. 417-18), is not guilty of any
serious moral wrongdoing. Indeed, it is to Nature's credit
that she can distinguish between the gradual servile de-
basement of self which identifies the lovers of Venus and
the more elevating person centered relationship which the
royal tercel wishes to attain with his love.

Another related point in Alanus' treatise is that Na-
ture is especially irked by man's inhumanity to man and so
experiences no misgivings in registering bitter complaints
about human behavior. For instance, Nature promises to
brand with the mark of anathema those men who abuse the gift
of humanity by uninterrupted sin (P.8, 237-63). Elsewhere
the heavenly goddess chides Generosity because she weeps at
the condemnation of those who try more destructively than
others to ruin mankind (P.9, 25-59). In general, the last
three proses, given over to an enumeration of what Nature
does not like in man, are spoken with a clear voice and
without mincing of words. The same decisiveness appears in
Chaucer's Nature. After declaring that the royal eagle is
to have first choice of mates, Nature says:

"And after hym by ordre shul ye chese,
After youre kynde, everich as yow lyketh,
And, as youre hap is, shul ye wynne or lese.
But which of yow that love most entriketh,
God sende hym hire that sorest for hym
syketh!"  
(ll. 400-04)

In an equally direct manner Nature concludes the debate:

"Now pes," quod Nature, "I comaunde heer!
For I have herd al youre opynyoun
And in effect yit be we nevere the neer.
But fynally, this is my conclusion,
That she hirself shal han hir eleccioun
Of whom hire lest; whoso be wroth or blythe,
Hym that she cheest, he shal hire han as swithe.
(ll. 617-23)

It is plain that the goddess does not toy with subtleties.
Yet commonly, commentators on the Parliament go to Nature
in order to decipher the hidden attitudes she has towards
the major classes of birds. It seems to me that since
Nature, both in the treatise and the poem, is candid and
patently unwilling to deal in sophistry, the approach of
these critics is wrong. It likewise becomes obvious that
none of the fowls is a hardened sinner, least of all a
conspicuous follower of Venus as Robertson suggests, because
if one were, it is probable that he would be censured by
Nature. For the most part Nature is content to let man
act out his own imperfect drama without interference. That
is why she permits the formel eagle to make a suitable choice

5 Donald C. Baker, "The Poet of Love and the Parliament
of Foules," University of Mississippi Studies in English,
2 (1961), 103; Robertson, pp. 128-30.

6 Loc. cit.
among those who love her. On the other hand, when the 
birds forget the decent order of parliamentary procedure, 
Nature is always there to call them into line. She speaks 
because she cannot put up with disorder. Thus it follows 
that if the goddess is concerned with the physical order-
ing of the debate, her interest in the moral state of the 
birds must certainly be as great. And since Nature has 
little to say about this matter, it may be assumed that 
she is satisfied with the conduct of the fowls.

Viewing Nature's silence in this manner raises serious 
obstacles to the criticism of Gardiner H. Stillwell and 
Dorothy Bethurum, both of whom see a general disorder in 
the debate which they feel indicates Chaucer's attempt to 
emphasize human perversity. 7 Early in the fourth prose of 
the De Planctu Nature chastises man for the disorder in 
ordering his world, the carelessness of his government, 
and the unjustness of his laws, and later she specifically 
delineates some of her charges:

The evening of faith lies upon the world, and the 
night of the chaos of falsehood is everywhere. 
Faith sickens with fraud; fraud, too, deceives 
itself by fraud, and thus guile is upon the heels

7 For these viewpoints see "Unity and Comedy in Chau-
cer's Parlement of Foules," Journal of English and Germanic 
Philology, 49 (1950), 484; "The Center of the Parlement of 
Foules," Essays in Honor of Walter Clyde Curry (Nashville, 
of guile. In the sphere of conduct, morals lack morality; laws lack law; justice loses the righteousness of its course. . . . The law of goodness—to esteem good men—is considered false, and the law of piety is impiety, and to be pure is to all a cause of disgrace. (M.6, 10-35)

Here are offenses stubbornly contrary to the harmony of society, as it were, crimes against humanity standing in stark opposition to the boisterous disagreements of the squabbling birds. The impatience, cynicism, and selfish criticism of the lower birds are undeniable, but a fact frequently unheeded is that all the birds, in spite of their caviling, are working towards a common goal, sharing a community of interests. Nature, no arbitrary monarch, gives her blessing to the parliament but withholds it from man in the De Planctu because in the former the birds sincerely strive to accomplish the common good and in the latter man has no collective objective. Neither is Nature Janus-faced, with one disposition towards man in the poem and another in the treatise. Chaucer's Nature delights in creatures dwelling together, even though she realizes man cannot live in perfect accord since there are too many subtle complexities and conflicts within human society. Alanus' Nature bewails man because he has repudiated the practices of humanity, essentially man's call to "commune profyt," and so has brutalized himself. With the wholesale indictment of the
parliament I cannot agree, for it is immediately evident that such dehumanization is not characteristic of the assembly.

Nature is the second figure in the Parliament who promulgates the doctrine of common profit. The first is Scipio Africanus. Both wish man would "into a blysful place wende" (I, 48), but their means of arriving at this ultimate end are divergent. The difference lies in the fact that Nature makes reason a virtue indigenous to man, something he can use to bring about his own perfectibility, while Scipio, refusing to make allowance for the imperfection of man, forces him to submit blindly to the inexorable laws governing all things. In the De Planctu Nature claims that the activity of reason takes its rise from a celestial source and, mindful of virtuous behavior, leads again to heaven. In addition, reason illuminates the darkness by the light of contemplation, makes man talk with angels, and teaches him to find in exile a home (P.3, 88-104). For Nature, therefore, it is reason which dictates justice to Venus and Cupid, and which seeks to justify the existence of these gods as part of the divine plan. Reason also accounts for Nature's approval of legitimate sexual pleasure and her ability to see unlimited hierarchies of worth in love. Finally, reason explains why Nature treats
the fowls with such equanimity, because she sympathizes with the fallen condition of man. As J. A. W. Bennett says, we cannot look for anything heretical in Chaucer's Nature as long as reason is predicated of her. His statement is rightly based on the assumption that whenever Nature acts, she acts prudently; that is, her course of action depends on what she thinks is best for man when his natural inclinations as a rational being are considered. The imprudent failure to regard the total nature of man is a very noticeable shortcoming of Africanus' stoical philosophy since it demands the deification of man through superhuman channels, channels which forbid the enjoyment of the concupiscible and irascible passions.

Several other points relating to Nature and Africanus are in need of clarification. In the first place the elder Scipio is usually presented as the guide leading the poet through the garden of love, but the more logical suggestion is that Nature is the actual guide and that Africanus serves as another of her foils (Venus being primary). Although the dreamer withdraws from active participation in the de-


9Baker, p. 95, is one of those critics maintaining that Africanus is the narrator's guide through the park.
bate, because of Nature's direction in moderating the birds, he is exposed to the realistic concept that there are many human attitudes towards love. With Africanus as his guide this is just not the case. The fanatical idealism of the old stoic would prevent him from experiencing "Love in dede" (1. 8), which, it will be recalled, is a necessary preliminary to the attainment of celestial love. Furthermore, next to Nature's more enlightened view of love and sexual pleasure, a point of view that is triumphantly humanistic because it considers the natural world fit for study and delight, Africanus' general outlook of contempt for the world easily tends to a negative extreme in which all efficacy is denied to the physical world, to the self, and to all pleasure.

Moreover if, as I contend, the *Parliament of Fowls* achieves structural unity by its hierarchical ordering of the degrees of love and by its commentary on the various levels of love, Nature is a more appropriate guide than Africanus simply because she is the key to immensely wider implications in the poem. With the arrival of Nature the description of the garden assumes new force and significance. Not only does she explain and complement the life and fecundity found there, but she also confirms the impression that Chaucer wants to convey of Venus. Africanus functions to
introduce humorously the important topic of common profit, but otherwise his stoicism is too narrow-minded to be taken seriously. And in the wrangle among the birds Chaucer employs as subject matter for the debate the medieval genre, the demande d'amour, one of the literary forms which grew naturally out of the courtly enjoyment in discussing love. Indeed, it would be incongruous to use this type of genre under the sponsorship of Africanus. Nature is the better choice of sponsors. Finally, soon after the reader meets the goddess Nature sitting on a hill of flowers, he is told the ostensible reason for the assembly:

For this was on seynt Valentynes day,
Whan every foul cometh there to chese his make,
Of every kynde that men thynke may,
And that so huge a noyse gan they make
That erthe, and eyr, and tre, and every lake
So ful was, that unethe was there space
For me to stonde, so ful was al the place.

(11. 308-15)

It is Nature alone who is responsible for calling the fowls together to choose mates. Her business, as seen in this stanza, is the perpetuation of the phenomenal world through procreation, a very different concern than that advocated by Africanus, namely, the contemptible worthlessness of the world. And if there is any truth to F. N. Robinson's supposition, that "some Valentine's Day celebration may have been the sole outward occasion of the Parliament," making Nature
the dominant figure when lovers choose their loves adds depth to the poem, for Nature becomes the patroness for single as well as married lovers and the innumerable degrees of good associated with their love.

It should be apparent that Nature is the perfect embodiment of a figure for love, even more so than the divine Cytherea. To be sure, the astrological Venus is at least partially equated with the goddess Nature, but in comparison with her Cytherea is somewhat effete, mostly because Nature has an active role in binding the universe with love and assisting human love as part of the higher love which moves the spheres in harmony, whereas Cytherea is a static symbol for the gradations of love. The power attributed to Nature both in the De Planctu and the Parliament is reminiscent of the might of divine love in Chaucer's translation of the Consolation:

That the world with stable feyth varieth accordable chaungynges; that the contrarious qualites of elementz holden among hemself allyaunce per­durable; that Phebus, the sonne, with his chariet bryngeth forth the rosenye day; that the moone hath comauement over the nyghtes, whiche nyghtes Esperus, the eve-sterre, hath brought; that the see, gredy to flowen, constreyneth with a cer­tein eende his floodes, so that it is nat leven­ful to strecche his brode termes or bowndes uppon

the erthes . . . al this accordaunce of thynges
is bounde with love, that governeth erthe and see,
and hath also comandement to the hevene.

(II, m.8, 1-16)

The glowing admiration Boethius has for the natural ordering of love is expanded in Alanus' Nature and intensified in Chaucer's maternal goddess. Chaucer goes beyond merely saying Nature represents the creative power of divine love working in the universe since through the parliamentary debate he puts us in the position to scrutinize and to take delight in the harmony and excellence which Nature strives to produce in man. Simultaneously, by way of Nature and the various figures set off against her Chaucer also attempts to provide some sort of answer to the dilemma of love. However, we must be cautious in reading the answer and not mistake Nature's optimistic humanism as license to do whatever we want, for we cannot forget the point made previously. It is only the man who knows what love is through his self-control that holds the key to a large part of the design of the universe. Nature's faith in man calls for sacrifice on his part, which means Nature always expects man to seek the higher echelons of common profit.

This strange mixture of leniency and severity, the final point about Nature before inquiring into the relevance of the catalogue of birds, is yet another aspect of the god-
dess which figures prominently in an evaluation of her. It originally surfaces in the *De Planctu* when Nature warmly reminds Man to look upon her as his "friend and confidant," but then she sternly amends her remark by announcing that her purpose in coming is to scourge the great crimes of man (P.4, 160-61). Earlier, just before she scolds mankind for marked shamelessness, Nature sympathetically avers that a knowledge of evil is necessary for human security (P.4, 152). Again, this combination of opposites is seen when the goddess chides Man for his timidity in asking questions of her and the great length she goes to in order to satisfy his queries (P.4, 250 ff.). In the *Parliament* Chaucer continues to capitalize on this facet of Nature's personality, uniting and bringing to an easy harmony both her divinity and homeliness. For instance, when the fowls persistently violate the precedence established by custom, Nature cries out:

"Have don, and lat us wende!"

How shoulde a juge eyther parti leve
For ye or nay, withouten any preve?"

(11. 492-97)

In fact, throughout the debate Nature is very skillful in maintaining the proper balance between earthly and heavenly qualities. Of course, this is something we have seen in the park of paradise with its own finely tempered modifica-


tion of extremes and, in some sense, we should have anticipated that what was true of Nature's domain would also be characteristic of her. As in the paradisiacal enclosure, Chaucer probably intends Nature to exemplify the harmony between the higher and lower parts of man's soul, thereby making the goddess a living example of what man should be.

Another explanation for the equilibrium resides in Nature's own desire to be approachable by man and, at the same time, not to lose his respect and confidence. If the goddess were to become too much like her protegé, she would be unworthy of emulation and little better than the earthly Venus. On the other hand, if Nature were too haughty and superior, she would be out of touch with the human condition and to some extent another Scipio Africanus. Above all, this reconciliation of opposites appears to occur because Nature is a realist par excellence. She fully perceives that in order to get positive results from man she must allow herself to come near him, to be readily known and immediately accessible in a way that God cannot be. Besides this she must provide man with incentives, realistic goals which are in reach of human nature. Likewise she must prod man with mercy and justice so that he does not give up the struggle to climb to the highest rung of love. It is also as a realist, then, that Nature monitors the parliament of
chattering birds and accepts their human attributes as part of the everyday world. Accordingly, she does not look for man to be perfect, only that he be working towards perfection. This observation is still another reason for disregarding the notion of those who argue that "the parliament shows how the corruption of Venus spreads from the noble birds to the other classes of society."\textsuperscript{11} The \textit{Parliament of Fowls} may be a satiric comment on human folly, but as the study of Nature suggests, it is far from being an outright condemnation of the vices of mankind.

Chaucer's catalogue of birds (11. 323-71) supports the idea that he agrees with Nature in viewing the fowls realistically. Although such critics as Donald C. Baker believe that the catalogue is a "too lengthy and detailed description of the various birds,"\textsuperscript{12} a brief study is warranted if only to conclude that Chaucer does not offer a myopic picture of life. Editors since Walter W. Skeat have mentioned that Chaucer, instead of depicting the birds as part of the inanimate \textit{animalium concilium} on the multicolored garments of Nature (P.1, 204-432), has introduced them as grouped about the goddess Nature in lively debate. But few have

\textsuperscript{11}Robertson, p. 126.

\textsuperscript{12}Baker, p. 102.
duly noted that after Alanus declares the birds of prey to be of her vesture, he groups the remaining birds almost haphazardly, omitting the sense of hierarchy present even in Chaucer's initial classification of birds:

the foules of ravyne
Weere hyest set, and thanne the foules smale
That eten, as hem Nature wolde enclyne,
As worm or thyng of which I telle no tale;
And water-foul sat lowest in the dale;
But foul that lyveth by sed sat on the grene,
And that so fele that wonder was to sene.

(11. 323-29)

It is essentially unimportant where Chaucer receives the idea for this division; whether it is the somewhat similar classification of six groups of birds that Vincent of Beauvais ascribes to Aristotle in *Speculum Naturale* (XVI, 14), or whether it is the four classes of fowls, divided according to their eating habits, which Albertus Magnus defines in the *De Animaliis*.

The plain truth is that commentators, in their hurry to state what Chaucer's four major categories of fowls typify, have neglected to ask why he utilizes hierarchy where his source does not. The ready answer, I venture to say, is not that the poet wants to make some abbreviated comment on the different classes of society *per se*, but that he, first of all, almost spontaneously associates hierarchisms and order with the goddess

13Robertson, p. 125.
Nature, and secondly he finds that this basic pattern of thought is better suited to the tiered structure of the poem and its fundamental theme of love. Since so far Chaucer has designed the Parliament to look steadily at the gradations of love, he now presumably means to remind his readers that they have the obligation to love and that not even the lowest members of society are exonerated from common profit because they in their own way must do their utmost to help others.

What is strikingly evident after perusing Chaucer's catalogue of birds is its failure to describe just those birds--like the turtle dove, raven, crow, throstle, and snowy fieldfare--which are harbingers of good and of merriment. At least one-third of the birds depict realistic, frequently despicable attributes of humanity. Expectedly, several birds of prey reveal hostility to other living creatures. The goshawk, "the tiraunt with his fetheres donne/And grey" (ll. 334-35), recalls Alanus' hawk, which "demanded tribute from its subjects with violent tyranny" (P.1, 221-22); the hardy sparrowhawk is the perennial foe of quails, and the merlin, the smallest of the long-winged hawks, is the natural enemy of the lark. Numerous gentler fowls are given pejorative epithets: the jealous swan, the ill-boding owl, the thieving chough, the talkative magpie,
the mocking jay, the deceitful lapwing, the telltale starling, the cowardly kite, the lecherous sparrow, the unnatural cuckoo, the wanton popinjay, the murderous drake, and the gluttonous cormorants. Although Chaucer depends on the tradition of the encyclopedists for the dominant characters of the birds, he uses his greater originality in sketching them as background for one of his basic contentions; that is, man's world has obvious shortcomings which must be faced and not blinked away. Since Chaucer is unwilling to see his everyday world from a perspective other than its habitual one, he interlaces the good and bad traits of human character, mannerism, and appearance. It is, therefore, as an objective artist that Chaucer supplants the moralist. To this last point Bennett would add that the catalogue also subserves the artistic purpose of preparing the reader for the rivalries that are to come.

There is a corollary, however, to these statements. It is this. Chaucer conceives of the universe as the place

14 Thomas P. Harrison, They Tell of Birds: Chaucer, Spenser, Milton, Drayton (Austin, Texas, 1956), holds that Chaucer's catalogue "in pedestrian mood" closely follows Alanus' Latin text. Harrison cites Willard E. Farnham, "The Fowls in Chaucer's Parlement," University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature, 2 (1918), 345, as having the opposite point of view.

15 Bennett, p. 152.
where man naturally belongs and where he is happy when he exercises his normal functions, one of which is to do things imperfectly. Surely, as the catalogue implies, among the multitude of fowls gathered for mating are some who are guilty of enormous iniquities, but the fact itself does not justify impugning those who actively take part in the debate of major crimes. These participators, regardless of their states of perfection, are sincere, which accounts for their seeking an open solution to a problem. Unlike the minions of Venus, their actions are not relegated to darkness but transpire under the spiritual splendor of Nature. To visualize serious sin wherever a bird assumes a supercilious attitude or offers a rude intrusion is a gross mistake and inconsistent with Chaucer's humanitarianism. An effort should be made to see the good side of the birds with equal clarity, their responsiveness to the general welfare and their docility to Nature's instruction. Chaucer had the doctrine from medieval philosophy that all created things are fundamentally good, that evil is parasitic, a deprivation of goodness rather than an entity. Since God is the summit of all perfection, imperfection alone can be logically predicated of man. Hence the spokesmen for the birds are not morally degenerate because they are flawed. Being less than God explains their deficiency
in virtue. From previous considerations we know that Chaucer's sense of proportion is not out of joint. He does not entertain the notion that most men are nefarious sinners, and it is understandable why he would not seek to justify this conclusion in his fowls. Furthermore, to regard the birds as other than ordinary representatives of mankind is tantamount to accusing Chaucer of mockery, since this charge makes him a radical heretic disavowing his own positive philosophy and the worst kind of hypocrite. If the fowls and their debate have instructional value, it is because Chaucer takes the time to balance the worlds within his purview, scrupulously avoiding preference to any of them.

To recapitulate, it has been pointed out that the goddess Nature, a less intense shining of the Eternal Light of love, is the beneficent governess of the order and stability of the cosmos. As such, her principal onus is to direct and keep wayward man on a steady course so that he can reach divine love through the intermediary stages of human love. Even though whatever mankind executes under the guidance of Nature cannot be classified as sin, because it is not right to class as sin what is natural to him, he is not exempted from the responsibility of following intelligently the higher forms of common profit. Completely
human impulses must be subordinated to reason if *amor rationalis* is to be attained. It is then not only Nature's concern to oversee marriage and the begetting of legitimate offspring but also to disclose how human love of one person can lead to the love of many persons. In the *Parliament* the maternal goddess exemplifies this lesson chiefly through the magnanimity and sympathy she extends to the birds. And because of her ever-present empathy Nature is Chaucer's perfect spokeswoman; this is especially true since neither the author nor his persona can be a guide in any spiritual sense without appearing hypercritical. Thus having scrutinized the deeper implications of Nature's personality, we are ready to view the levels of love found in the great debate.
Chapter V. The Great Debate

There is nothing in Nature's introduction of the first tercel eagle indicative of displeasure. Besides being "wyse and worthi, secre, trewe as stel" (l. 395), he far surpasses the other fowls in nobility and rank. To be sure, if the goddess were allowed her own choice of mates for the formel eagle on this Saint Valentine's Day, it would be this suitor. Likewise, after the aristocratic bird solemnly protests his undying allegiance to the formel's service, to do her bidding even if it means death, the heavenly goddess has no words of reproach for him. The fact that he pleads for his lady as a complete courtly lover engaged in a *debat d'amour* does not detract from his love, thereby making it in any way shameless or profligate, but it suggests that he expresses his devotion with endearments befitting his royal dignity. When his amatory behavior is compared with the self-centered love depicted in the allegorical personifications of the garden, the purity of his commitment is more readily seen. At once it becomes obvious
that the ideal of courtly love involves what may be called "interpersonal relationships" between the lover and his beloved, that is, an awareness of another center of consciousness. Though the first tercel will have the formel as his "soverayn," there is little reason to doubt that his courtly avowals are not part of the necessary prerequisites to marriage and to the development of more person-centered ideas. After all, the explicit purpose for the convocation of fowls is "to chese or for to take" a formel or a mate (11. 370-71), and since the pairing is achieved under Nature's "ryghtful ordenaunce," marriage would appear to be the intention of all the birds, especially of those in authority. The innocent blushing of the formel (11. 442-45), indeed, confirms her understanding of his proposal.

On account of the growing popularity of D. W. Robertson's classification of the tercel's love, further discussion of its efficacy is demanded. The difference between the good love which the mystics envisioned and the bad love which the medieval church condemned was ultimately a question of the degree of aspiration. The higher forms of love terminated more in God than in man. For instance, if a woman were loved for her own sake, this passion was repre-

hensible; but if she were loved for the sake of God, this love was charity. "Charity," Saint Thomas Aquinas said, "denotes, in addition to love, a certain perfection of love, insofar as that which is loved is held to be of great price, as the word *carus* itself implies" (S.T., I-II, Q.26, a.3). That love which stopped short of God would be in the Christian view no more than lust. For this reason it is difficult to call the royal tercel's affection for the formel lust. The vicar of God, Nature herself, is present during the declaration of love, and it would be an inescapable affront to the goddess, one which she could certainly not overlook, to accuse the tercel of cupidity. Saint Augustine, who has some of the harshest statements concerning man's carnality, recognizes that it is rational to use the things of this world so that man may seize what is spiritual and eternal through what is material and temporal. Consequently, the noble eagle does not hit a sour note with his speech because, as Nature realizes, he is attempting to cultivate a basically loving attitude towards the formel with his open acknowledgment of her dignity and uniqueness. This disposition implies, of course, that he intends the good of all other fowls since it keeps love out of the sphere

---

2See St. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*, I, 33, for further elaboration of this point.
of the impersonal and the condescending. Inasmuch as the tercel is unafraid to abase himself before the multitude of birds, he is consciously fighting the tendency to make himself the center of the universe, a position which obviates a patronizing manner and which accepts the lower ranks of birds as much more than mere satellites and servants. Through his concern for the formel, then, the royal eagle admits a willingness to come out of himself and to reach to others.

J. A. W. Bennett, another who acquits the first tercel of immorality, notes by way of redemption that the eagle's appeal for reciprocation of love resembles Troilus' letter to Criseyde in the second book (ll. 1065 ff.) of Chaucer's long tragic poem. However, what Bennett has left unsaid is that Troilus' love for Criseyde, crystallized in the letter, is not a "coming down" from the heights of Book One, where the hero's blind pride, presumption, arrogance and egotism ran rampant before his first glimpse of Criseyde in the temple. Troilus' later agonies of love are actually


a going up, a going out of self to a much greater good, to a more excellent expression of love. His love, I suspect, is in some way ennobling if the epilogue is to be adequately accounted for. For example, in the final scene Troilus' disenchantment with Criseyde leads to renewed interest in the public weal. It is as if his love for the young widow has attained for him a new perspective, a freeing of self from egoism and a dedication to common profit, even when it means death on the battlefield. Love, no matter how courtly and ritualistic it may be, offers both Troilus and the first royal eagle the opportunity of breaking out of self-imprisonment and of directing the affective drive toward others. In both instances it is not the tonality of love which is in question: whether it is warm or passionate or not, but the direction: whether its basic orientation is toward self or toward others.

Convincing evidence supporting this point of view can be found in the Franklin's Tale. Early in the narrative Arveragus displays the typical symptoms of the courtly lover: "his wo, his peyne, and his distresse" (V 737).

And in order that he and Dorigen may live the more happily,

Arveragus swears as her knight

That nevere in al his lyf he, day ne nyght,
Ne sholde upon hym take no maistrie
Agayn hir wyl, ne kithe hire jalousie,
But hire obeye, and folwe hir wyl in al,
As any lover to his lady shal,
Save that the name of soveraynetee,
That wolde he have for shame of his degree.

(V 746-52)

This is the same basic profession the first tercel makes to his lady:

"And if that I to hyre be founde untrewe,
Disobeysaunt, or wilful negligent,
Avauntour, or in proces love a newe,
I preye to yow this be my jugement,
That with these foules I be al torent,
That ilke day that evere she me fynde
To hir untrewe, or in my gilt unkynde.

(11. 428-34)

The essential distinction between these two lovers is that Arveragus' desire finally culminates in marriage, whereas the eagle must wait one year before receiving the formel's judgment. If we go on to ask whether Arveragus' love for Dorigen reached out to other men and made possible a harmonious accord where none was visible previously, we have only to cite Aurelius and his old colleague the magician. Through his unselfish love Arveragus caused these social lechers to be conscious of the welfare of others. Of course, the most generous of the three men was he who had the most to lose. The magician forfeited a thousand pounds, the squire an affair, and the knight the fidelity of his
beloved wife. Hence, the spiritual merit of each act of abnegation varies according to the good it accomplishes or to the otherness it involves. The royal tercel, much like Arveragus, sacrifices himself in order to possess the formel in honorable marriage. Inasmuch as Nature describes her progeny as "the moste benygne and the goodlieste" (l. 375), there is every hope, if the formel chooses the noblest eagle as her spouse, that their marriage will be productive of peaceful agreement and great concern for others.

After the first tercel's quiet sophistication in declaring his love, the blunt rejoinder of the second eagle appears as an unwarranted intrusion:

"That shal nat be!
I love hire bet than ye don, by seint John,
Or at the leste I love hire as wel as ye,
And lenger have served hire in my degre,
And if she shulde have loved for long lovyng,
To me ful-longe hadde be the guerdonynge.
(ll. 450-55)

The plain-spokenness of this tercel "of lower kynde" signals his moral worth. He has nothing to hide, so that he does not have to resort to dissimulation, feigned politeness, or flattery, as the false courtly lover must do, to gain the attention of the formel. This male eagle can stand on his own merits and legitimately plead length of fealty as the outstanding claim to his lady's hand. Additionally, since he has already shown that desire has risen
above sensual appetite into service, when he vows to act "hyre honour for to save" (l. 461), he indicates his enthusiasm to suffer further acts of selflessness for his beloved. Thus it is quite clear that the second tercel cannot be deemed an insensitive courtier trying to dominate the beneficiary of his kindness by using her to satisfy his own sexual needs. Because he is a loving fowl, he wants to give not only worshipful service but also a fuller communication of himself, one which has more than the token significance of mere words and gestures. His frank admission of love has as its end, not a morally compromising liaison, but an upright proposal of matrimony. Insofar as the second tercel seeks to subject his sensual appetite to the regulation of reason, his love is rational (amor rationalis) and is oriented toward common profit.

In spite of the growing agitation of the lesser birds for a cessation of the speeches and hints at Nature's own eagerness to proceed with the mating, the third tercel, with the dogged determination of one who refuses to be dismissed lightly, presents his bid for the formel's hand:

"But I dar seyn, I am hire treweste man
As to my dom, and faynest wolde hire ese.
At shorte wordes, til that deth me sese,
I wol ben heres, whether I wake or wynke,
And trewe in al that herte may bethynke."

(11. 479-83)
Humble service is also at the core of his profession. Together with his fellow eagles, this one accepts the undeniable fact that genuine love, in leaving behind the limited securities of self-centeredness, involves many more or less painful dyings of self. The dreamer-narrator, who has listened intently during these protestations, observes about the third eagle's confession:

Of al my lyf, syn that day I was born,
So gentil pie in love or other thyng
Ne herde nevere no man me beforne.
(11. 484-86)

Although the speaker may be stumbling and obtuse, it is difficult denying that he does not know what has been true until he hears the eagle's speech, for it is equivalent to saying he does not know what pleases him. The denial of the third tercel's sincerity, especially after the narrator's direct testimony, portends a much larger issue.

If the reader of the *Parliament of Fowls* is to accept the opinion of such obviously reputable scholars as D. W. Robertson and Charles O. MacDonald that the love sworn to by all three eagles is offered primarily with a view to satisfying their own inordinate sexual cravings, he must be prepared to give serious thought to the premise that man is essentially a prevaricator since his public testa-
ments of love are not to be taken at face value. It would appear that the insincerity predicated of the eagles arises from a distrust of courtly love, particularly from its reputation for fostering amours. This conclusion is the only one that can be drawn when commentators contend the poem expresses the conflict between courtly love and natural love for common profit. Yet to condemn courtly love ipso facto is to acknowledge that the direction of love is irrelevant. Such a statement is patently irrational. Clearly, Chaucer's contemporaries understood that the command to love another as Christ loved them demanded a dedicated dying of self to achieve a greater good. This seems to be what the eagles are doing, sacrificing their ego-centeredness in order to attain a higher level of love. In the absence of substantial contradictory evidence, the external actions of these aristocratic birds must be believed.

Besides the unrelaxed suspicion of courtly love, some critics contend the dreamer-narrator's remark that the eagles continued their gentle plea "from the morwe . . . tyl doun-

6 Ibid., p. 289.
ward drow the sonne wonder faste" (ll. 489-90) is an indication of their self-centeredness. Surely, it is inconsiderate to keep the other fowls from mating, but it is just as likely the eagles become so absorbed in their conscientious declarations of love that they lose all track of time. And further, these same critics are wont to single out the idealistic language of the speeches as an instance of the eagles' disingenuousness. Because their manner of speaking has an unmistakable polish, one which does not characterize them as fools, a certain sophistication can be said to belong to them by aristocratic breeding, not by wicked design. Since the three eagles are not commoners, they should not be required to speak as such. Despite the courtly language of the suitors, each is presented realistically. The first tercel evinces the highest degree of urbanity and self-possession in addressing the formel, while the second impulsively blurts out his claim, and the last patiently competes with the annoyance of the lower fowls for a hearing. All three eagles have individual differences that make them appear very human, consequently, imperfect. The point which cannot be overemphasized is that no matter how forthright the expression of love, it will always be accompanied by personal peculiarities and defects. To accuse the royal tercels
of serious sin simply because of eternal human nature detected in their manner is wrong.

To some extent those who maintain that Chaucer uses the aristocratic tercels to comment on certain contemporary attitudes are correct. In the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, the crone tells the faithless knight that nobility of character must be earned by virtuous living, for it does not belong to one on account of title or position. In revealing a less than perfect side to the eagles, Chaucer seems to anticipate the instruction of the hag. He is gently reminding his courtly audience that the true test of mettle is moral excellence, not ancestry. In the assertion of love the eagles are honestly striving to be straightforward. There is not the slightest hint that they depend on rank as a basis for their claims, but nonetheless they still have other imperfections which mar their character. Assuredly, some in Chaucer's audience relied on royal status as a pretext for worth. When these hypocrites compared themselves with the tercels, they saw how far behind they were in the development of self. In addition, Chaucer's commentary has another edge. Through the restlessness of the other birds, the poet appears to be intimating that the lower orders are not to acquiesce unthinkingly in even the unintentional thoughtlessness of the privileged class.
The common profit of all social ranks demands that the peerage be held accountable for its title, for the smooth functioning of the state.

The impatience of the lower classes cannot be contained any longer, and for a moment it breaks forth in all its vehemence:

The noyse of foules for to ben delyvered
So loude rong, "Have don, and lat us wende!"
That wel wende I the wode hadde al to-shyvered.
"Com of!" they criede, "allas, ye wol us shende!
Whan shal youre cursede pleynge have as ende?
How sholde a juge eyther parti leve
For ye or nay, withouten any preve?"

(11. 491-97)

This outburst has led some critics to regard the noble birds as tyrannical because of "their selfish demands on the patience of the other members of society," or to charge them with little concern for the "commune profyt." Immedi­ately, however, it must be noted that the goddess Nature silences the lower orders with unaccustomed sternness and the three tercels for taking too much time in their proposals. From what has been learned of Nature in the De Planctu Naturae, the present interjection of authority results from a grave violation of order. On the other hand, Nature does not interrupt the eagles because their long-

Robertson, p. 131, and MacDonald, p. 285.
winded speeches are only a minor infraction of order. It would seem that the maternal goddess has a purpose, which is not realized by the lesser birds, and perhaps not even by the aristocratic eagles themselves, for disregarding the extreme length of their addresses and for prolonging the pairing of the other birds in spite of the frustrating boredom. What, then, are the specific advantages Nature envisages to the assembled fowls?

In answering this query, it is necessary to take a closer look at a concept current in Chaucer's day:

Law denotes a kind of principle (ratio) directing acts towards an end. Now wherever there are movers ordered to one another, the power of the second mover has to be derived from the power of the first mover, since the second mover does not move except in so far as it is moved by the first. Hence we observe the same in all those who govern, so that the plan (ratio) of government is derived by secondary governors from the governor in chief; thus the plan of what is to be done in a state flows from the king's command to his inferior administrators. (S.T., I-II, q.93, a.3)

Accordingly, social order, that which laws assist in establishing, is administered by rightly constituted superiors who are answerable for the common good of the multitude. By virtue of their rank, the three royal eagles are designated to care for the general welfare. Some large benefits must accrue to society by having one of its chief ministers married to a formel who is described as having "everi vertu"
We have only to look to Dorigen in order to determine whether the virtuous wife of a lord can be an asset to the public weal. In another example, the loving wife of the Knight in Black, pictured in the Book of the Duchess as "enclyned to all goode" (1. 991) and so truthful it seemed "Trouthe hymself ... had chose hys maner principal/in her" (ll. 1003-05), certainly did much to foster greater harmony within the state. To the lower fowls, who are more immersed in the bustle of everyday practicalities, the comportment of the tercels remains incomprehensible. Only to Nature, who is charged with governing the general order of creation, belongs a full appreciation of the value which attaches to the state from the proper mating of the nobility.

The most apparent objection to this general thesis is that as far as the three tercels are concerned, the parliament ends in irresolution, with Nature finally granting the bride-to-be another year to settle the issue. If the marriage of one of the suitors is so important to the commonweal, why does Nature permit the extra year? This query ignores two significant facts. First, Nature never attempts to abridge man's freedom of choice, as can be seen in the goddess' final "plug" for the first royal eagle:
"But as for conseyl for to chese a make,
If I were Resoun, certes, thanne wolde I
Conseyle yow the royal tercel take."

(11. 631-33)

The goddess highly recommends the tercel, but she will not compel the formel to accept his bid. Second, during the year in which the three tercels contend for the formel, if their love is to have any lasting substance, their passion must be mastered. This control requires more than merely remaining chaste and faithful, which alone is sufficient to put their love on a higher plateau, but it also calls for the continued development of other-centeredness, for egotistic selfishness will surely lose the lady eagle. When the eagles' chaste love harmonizes with altruism, affirmative and effective steps are actually being taken towards fulfilling the ideal of common profit. And so, even while the noble birds prove their worth in action, the state does not languish as a result of their interests.

To sum up these observations on the three royal eagles, the love the tercels express for the formel, although phrased in the elegant language of the court, is honest and straightforward, and also a type of *amor rationalis* since it is an other-oriented drive seeking to serve and to discover someone else. Furthermore, those who hold
that the eagles are essentially bad appear to be arguing on weak grounds. Carried to its logical extreme, the negation of the eagles' veracity comes dangerously close to denying the truthfulness of men in general, a pessimistic point of view which hardly reflects Chaucer's positive philosophy. They likewise err who regard the marriage of the formel with a tercel as productive of perfect bliss. Vicissitudes, as well as delight and satisfaction, are always involved in loving. We cannot expect the eagles to love perfectly, any more than we can anticipate this of mankind. In their offers of humble devotion, we glimpse an artless attempt to break out of self, to be converted from self-centeredness. Their participation in common profit is commensurate with the success they have in this ceaseless struggle. So it is that in the very effort to love fully and humanly, the royal birds are rising above the unlawful and egotistic love depicted in the temple of Venus and, simultaneously, are achieving perfection in divine love. Unmistakably, all of the noble eagles are making forward progress along the hierarchy of love.

The lower classes of birds are also included within

8 Bennett, p. 162.
this hierarchical schema, and they, like their aristocratic counterparts, betray definite symptoms of humanity, so much so that even pandemonium prevails for a moment when the goose, cuckoo, and turtle-dove react to the protracted speeches of the tercels. The scene is comically human, with the goose indignantly advising, "Al this nys not worth a flye!" (l. 501), the cuckoo hypocritically alleging "comune spede" as the reason for interrupting the proceedings by "myn owene autorite" (ll. 506-07), and the turtle-dove humbly defending the rights of the noble fowls against the loud challenges of the lower orders. Though the turtle-dove's admonition smacks of too much subservience, it is the only modulated voice heard prior to Nature's sharp intervention. Her controlled tone carries with it an instantaneous censure of her two fellow fowls. Their demeanor is no better than what they are grumbling about, the lack of sympathetic regard for others. It additionally conveys the indispensable need creatures themselves feel for order. The turtle-dove's implied preference for system naturally falls to the noble class, for they have some authority which may be useful in settling pressing issues. But Nature's rebuke for a short time halts the quarrel and takes the matter out of the hands of everyone.
The goddess delivers the assembly from the general commotion by insisting that each major group of birds select a spokesman to represent its views on whom the formel should choose as suitor. In this orderly fashion, the common good will best be served. Assenting to Nature's judgment, the birds of prey elect a falcon-tercelet "to diffyne al here sentence" (ll. 529-30). At once he pinpoints the heart of the difficulty:

"Ful hard were it to preve by resoun
Who loveth best this gentil formel heere;
For everych hath swich replicacioun
That non by skilles may be brought adoun.
I can not se that argumentes avayle:
Thanne semeth it there moste be batayle."
(ll. 534-39)

True to the knightly code of his class, the tercelet cites trial by arms as one method of determining the worthiest suitor. But as soon as the three eagles answer "al redy!", he asserts that they have interrupted his pronouncement, and continuing, he announces that the most acceptable eagle is he who is pre-eminent in knighthood, estate, and gentleness of blood. The highbreeding of which the tercelet speaks is not the worldly "gentilesse" cultivated for the purpose of seduction, but the true "gentilesse" of virtue. Admittedly, the proposals of this bird of prey reflect the beliefs and partialities of his class, yet nothing in his solution insinuates that he has become a panderer seeking
to gratify the sexual appetites of the nobility. Such a conclusion is not only at odds with what we know of the royal tercels but also is contrary to the character of the falcon-tercelet. For example, after his selection as spokesman, Nature receives him "with glad entente" (l. 532), certainly a sign of her approval. He is courteous, a model of politeness when the suitors interpose in his judgment: "if that I durste it seye, ye don me wrong" (11. 541-42). J. A. W. Bennett sees the tercelet's refusal to identify the eagle he prefers as an indication of solicitude for others. Finally, along with the nobler birds the tercelet has an eye for correct governmental procedure. His predilection for order amidst the confusion of the moment no doubt makes him welcome to Nature. Again, it appears that the aristocratic fowls are too much maligned by their association with the code of courtly love. What the tercelet advances in the way of an untanglement supports "commune profit." Although the refinement of his manner may turn some against him and the nobler class, as it does the lesser fowls, the tercelet's response to the commonweal must be applauded because, in effect, it establishes the selfless love of the general welfare as the

\[9\text{Ibid., p. 170.}\]
A full-scale debate erupts with the noisy cackling of the garrulous, self-important goose, "elected" spokesman for the waterfowl. Her dire lack of noble eloquence and fine feeling contrasts sharply with the formal, sober presentation of the tercelet:

"Pes! now tak kep every man,  
And herkeneth which a resoun I shal forth brynge!  
My wit is sharp, I love no taryinge;  
I seye I rede hym, though he were my brother,  
But she wol love hym, lat hym love another!"  
(ll. 563-67)

In trumpeting her own nimble insight, the silly goose forgets the immediate problem being discussed and turns attention to the more practical question of what is to happen to those two suitors who are unsuccessful, since they too have vowed everlasting love. With the goose as his chief accomplice, Chaucer has dramatically contrived to shift the general debate more emphatically to the subject of love so that, in all probability, he can focus with greater thoroughness on a wider range of distinctly human attitudes. The goose may not comprehend what motivates the royal tercels to engage in such lengthy, tiresome declarations, but she is willing to make some sort of contribution towards ending their dilemma. No matter how succinctly she may put her advice, the goose introduces a
possible solution to what she thinks is the fundamental problem. This long-necked fowl may want delicacy of feeling, but she is unafraid to go out of herself in order to deal with an issue influencing the common good. Moreover, her realistic prescription, to let him love another, can be construed with lustful proclivities only misleadingly, for experience, presumably, counsels her that the displaced lovers must control hopeful longings by a more sensible course of conduct. It can hardly be considered sexual perversion to seek another companion once rejected. At least, this is one of the logical means to assuage the hurt.

When the sparrowhawk rejoins, "Lo, here a parfit resoun of a goos!" (l. 568), he summarizes the disturbed reaction of those of gentle birth to what they regard as irreverent advice. The bird of prey is provoked, and he lets everyone know about it:

"Lo, swich it is to have a tonge loos! Now, parde! fol, yit were it bet for the Han holde thy pes than shewed thy nycete. It lyth nat in his wit, ne in his wille, But soth is seyd, 'a fol can not be stille.'"

(11. 570-74)

The sparrowhawk cannot condone the simplistic answers of the lesser birds, nor can the goose fathom the courtly sentiments of the privileged classes. The whole humorous
scene is staged quite masterfully. A reasonable way out of the impasse is presented, and because each order has a predilection for its own constricted point of view, final harmony is slow in coming. Yet in playing off one class against another, Chaucer delivers his message with impact and force. Generally speaking, men desire the prospering of the common good, but much too often gaps between social classes or petty flaws of character, surmountable if confronted with patient understanding, keep men apart. Neither class of birds per se is ridiculed, not its different concept of love, nor its willingness to work for the community. Since the guise separating man from bird is so thin, the reader directly perceives a criticism of human society and one of the more important reasons explaining why man cannot arrive at a mutual accord. At this point the lament with which the Parliament opens should be recalled:

The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne,  
Th' assay so hard, so sharp the conquerynge,  
The dredful joye, alwey that slit so yerne:  
Al this mene I by Love. (11. 1-4)

A practicable common profit, just like the other forms of rational love, is difficult to learn, especially since it necessitates both self-control and moral discipline if it is to lead to permanent participation in God. The amusing
spectacle now being enacted reveals man in the process of struggling outside of himself, a process which is interminable because Love itself is inaccessible in this life. As the great debate suggests, man should be spurred to ascend the higher realms of common profit by seeing the good yet to be done and the consequent rewards both on earth and in heaven.

The demure turtle-dove, the chosen representative for the seedfowls, is the next speaker. At once she injects her seriousness into the debate:

"Nay, God forbede a lovere shulde chaunge!"

"Though that his lady everemore be straunge,
Yit lat hym serve hire even, til he be ded."

(11. 582-85)

In championing the lofty idealism of undying constancy, she fulfills a traditional role. Of her faithfulness Alanus de Insulis in the De Planctu says: "the turtle-dove, widowed of its mate, scorned to return to love, and refused the consolation of marrying again" (P.1, 264-66). Hers is a totally selfless solution to the problem first raised by the goose, and at the same time her commendable unselfishness is the ultimate answer to the attainment of the good life, a life according to virtue, on the individual as well as social planes. In personal relationships the turtle-dove's attitude implies that proper
love means complete dedication to the good of another, whereas socially it is equated with the good of many others. Even though this gentle bird only hypothesizes about what she would do if she were the rejected lover, we do have an accurate picture of her assisting the "commune profyt." Her stand for fidelity is idealistic enough to satisfy most of the nobler birds, and since she is undisputed spokesman for her own class, there seems to be some general consensus among the fowls for the course of action she espouses. And further, the conduct which the turtle-dove prescribes is the surest method of achieving one of the higher levels of common profit. Her genuine love, amor rationalis, leads her to fulfillment, not by drawing things to herself but by forcing a transcendence of self in order to become something greater than self. In other words, true spiritual love takes the isolated individual, exacts from him labor, sacrifice, and the gift of himself. It demands that he "lose his life," so that he may find it again on a higher level—in Love Himself. If interpreted in this way, the turtle-dove's remark, "I wol ben hires, til that the deth me take" (l. 588), contains a workable response to love's dilemma.

The duck's impatient intrusion is sufficient to break
the mood:

"That men shulde loven alwey causeles,
Who can a resoun fynde or wit in that?
Daunseth he murye that is myrtheles?
Who shulde recche of that is reccheles?
Ye quek!" yit seyde the doke, ful wel and fayre,
"There been mo sterres, God wot, than a
payre!"

In essence, this web-footed authority reiterates the practical considerations offered by the goose, but in more detail and with a greater stock of proverbial philosophy. His plain bluntness is reminiscent of somewhat similar advice given in the Wife of Bath's Prologue. With uncensored candor the Wife of Bath is speaking of chastity:

But this word is nat taken of every wight,
But ther as God lust gyve it of his myght,
I woot wel that th'apostel was a mayde;
But natheless, thogh that he wroot and sayde
He wolde that every wight were swich as he,
Al nys but conseil to virginitee.
And for to been a wyf he yaf me leve
Of indulgence; so nys it no repreve
To wedde me, if that my make dye,
Withouten excepcion of bigamye.

What the Wife of Bath asserts is conservative theology, based ultimately upon the utterances of St. Paul on marriage, a tradition which reaches back to the writings of the Church Fathers and ultimately to the Old Testament. Thus it is no sin, even of bigamy, to remarry if a husband dies. Of course, it would be more meritorious to remain widowed, but that counsel to perfection does not have to be followed.
Analogously, the turtle-dove takes the better, the surer route to perfection, while the duck advises a more human, less safe path to perfection, nonetheless a viable one. Consequently, it is unfair to say, as Robertson does, that the duck's realistic viewpoint has its origin and end in his own morbid preoccupation with sexual satisfaction.\(^1\)

Rather this fowl's argument should be taken as another contribution to the good of the parliament. Finally, MacDonald points out that the duck's concluding comment (1. 595) has a second meaning: "there are others waiting here for this to be settled; let's get on with it!"\(^2\) To be sure, this unrefined bird evinces a sympathy for the feelings of others which is in keeping with common profit.

The day has been long, monotonous, and tedious: tempers have become frayed. The duck's homespun wisdom rouses the normally gentle tercelet to a vigorous rebuke:

"Out of the donghill cam that word ful right! Thow canst nat seen which thyng is wel beset!"

(11. 597-98)

And as each bird loses patience with the opinions of the others, speaking out of turn becomes a commonplace. Without the formalities of a legal election, the pompous cuckoo,

\(^1\)Robertson, p. 137.

\(^2\)MacDonald, p. 287.
who spoke previously of the "comune spede," pushes himself forward as the self-chosen representative of the wormfowls. His recommendation is to the point:

"So I," quod he, "may have my make in pes, I reche nat how longe that ye stryve. Lat each of hem be soleyn al here lyve!"

(11. 605-07)

From what the cuckoo deems important, it is easy to see that there are numerous levels of common profit, some bordering on outright self-interest. Unquestionably, the wormfowl's suggestion, let them all remain single, is unworthy of accolades, but neither should it be cast aside as wholly lacking any concern for his fellow fowls. First of all, the cuckoo publicly utters his advice; he does not resort to the sly feints characteristic of many of Venus' minions. Besides, something of what he says is true, for bachelorhood is a possible remedy to the tercels' predicament and to love in general. Then again, the cuckoo's statement may be looked upon as just another reminder to get along with the proceedings. Lastly, the taunting personal attack by the merlin is the chief cause for the wormfowl's indictment:

"Ye, have the glotoun fild inow his paunche, Thanne are we wel!" seyde the merlioun; "Thow mortherere of the heysoge on the braunche That broughte the forth, thow retheweles glotoun!"
Lyve thow soley, wormes corupcioun!
For no fors is of lak of thy nature—
Go, lewed be thow whil the world may dure!"
(11. 610-16)

How much of this invective is justified remains to be seen, but it is clearly visible that the merlin argues ad hominem. To think that Chaucer wants wholehearted approval of most of this tirade is a mistake. In a more serious way he appears to be singling out still another stumbling block to common profit. And the cuckoo is the scapegoat who bears the brunt of the poet's instruction.

Since the great debate has jumped the limits of propriety and could possibly become a threat to the common good, Nature intervenes with alacrity to restore order. While she frankly confesses her dissatisfaction with the sentiments of the fowls because "in effect yit be we nevere the neer" (1. 619), the goddess fails to accuse the parliament of being careless of its obligations to the common profit. She cannot, for the birds present many reasonable solutions to the question of love. Although we may not agree with the various outlooks of the spokesmen nor admire any of their individual qualities, we ought to have some sympathy for what they feel and for what they attempt to accomplish. At the same time that natural delicacy of feeling and total dedication warrant admiration for the nobler birds, the
common-sense practicality of the less refined classes cannot go unnoticed. Even as all the fowls debate the inexhaustible subject of love, they, well within the bounds of sincerity, devote their traditional fortes to seeking a responsible solution. Their love is genuine inasmuch as it seeks an object outside themselves, and it also consists of varying gradations. Neither tercelet, goose, duck, nor cuckoo shares the assembly's mutual interest to the same unwavering degree; each speaker has reached a different stage of transformation, so to speak, into other persons. When their love is viewed in relation to the highest Love, it appears almost insignificant, but very definitely it has a valued place in Love's hierarchy.

Once again there is the danger of interpreting the entire debate solely as a philosophic-religious exercise. The considerable element of genial good-natured comedy permeating this section has an important role in the overall effectiveness of the Parliament. The principal source of humor derives from the typical human poses struck by the birds. The falcon-tercelet's aristocratic manner, the goose's self-glorification, the sparrowhawk's sarcasm, the turtle-dove's ladylike reserve, the duck's sharp good sense, the cuckoo's aggressiveness, and the merlin's barbed-tongue—all suggest recurring roles in the human
comedy. These thoroughly amusing figures are presented, not to minimize the import of Chaucer's message, but to make what he says more palatable. As a result, the reader is not frightened away because he becomes conscious of untoward moral severity in the tone of the poet, but reading further along, he discovers himself enmeshed in the profoundly relevant problem of common profit, the answer to which, all of a sudden, is much too clear. In addition, though it may not be Chaucer's primary intention to ridicule some aspects of the English social classes, it would be a mistake to contend there is no such criticism. It is obvious certain characteristic modes of social behavior are typified in each major order of fowls. For instance, the nobler birds must bear a resemblance to English royalty, particularly with its sophisticated code of manners and its penchant for idealism. To some extent the practical business world of mercantile London and the friction of daily life in the market place are reflected in the sound common sense, the extreme hardheadedness, and the dulling of feeling which are found in the lesser breeds. All this broadens the richness of Chaucer's poem. Simultaneously, it is wrong to claim that the poet evinces more than a trace of concern for contemporary life. Contentions like MacDonald's, "the glutton cuckoo, if by worm-fowl
luxury-loving clergy are meant, is in a fair way of being an archetypal figure of the man of the cloth" (p. 290), usually are weak in supporting evidence.

When we again listen to the goddess Nature, she is reiterating, and this time with more pertinence, her earlier judgment:

"Thanne wol I don hire this favour, that she Shal han right hym on whom hire herte is set, And he hire that his herte hath on hire knet."
(11. 626-28)

The implication is that the formel will select the eagle who is "destined" for her. In light of the inconclusive debate, Nature places great confidence in this noble lady and the proper suitor. To say the least, this is optimistic, especially if the estimation of some, that the parliament ends in utter futility, is to be believed. The goddess continues to trust, not because she feels instinctual nature will inevitably pursue the right choice, but because what eventuated has left her faith unshaken in the ability of creatures to effect good. Indicative of this is Nature's kindly treatment of the formel, who, in spite of her acknowledged superiority, is nevertheless an imperfect being. To argue she is the goddess' favorite and, therefore, receives preferential treatment is to give a shortsighted explanation as to why Nature grants the boon
the formel asks for, a respite of a year before voicing any decision. Maternal Nature is always anxious to bestow on her creatures anything which she thinks will be useful in bringing about the public welfare. The formel's unswerving allegiance, "I am evere under youre yerde" (l. 640), promises dedication to the harmony, order, and stability which Nature diligently strives to maintain. Likewise, her later specification is not without significance:

"I wol nat serve Venus ne Cupide, Forsothe as yit, by no manere weye."

(11. 652-53)

The formel's explicit rejection of the love associated with Venus and her son Cupid (amor sensitivus) is in actuality a reaffirmation of a very strong commitment to common profit. Instead of dehumanizing herself by making the ego her center of activity and, thus, insuring final moral sterility, this gentle fowl implies that she will concern herself with others' well-being, in short, to make love diffusive. Since her pledge cannot be viewed as something she alone is capable of performing, because such a denial would be tantamount to negating the efficacy of all virtuous conduct, Nature's hope for the formel also mirrors her optimism for all her charges. The goddess is must like a loving parent who is disappointed in the poor behavior of her children but continues to wish they will
do better. Then it is not surprising that when we next see Nature she is cheerfully dismissing the birds, who are now free to progress toward the common good through married love. And the goddess' closing speech to the tercels is more than a polite gesture or a pep talk, it is a reminder "to do wel," to act in the general interest of the community if they want the lady's choice to fall to them.

Before the fowls depart, however, they sing a roundel in honor of the goddess Nature to thank her for what she has given them:

"Now welcome, somer, with thy sonne softe, 
That hast this wintres wedres overshake, 
And driven away the longe nyghtes blake!"

"Saynt Valentyn, that art ful hy on-lofte, 
Thus syngen smale foules for thy sake: 
Now welcome, somer, with thy sonne softe, 
That hast this wintres wedres overshake.

"Wel han they cause for to gladen ofte, 
Sith ech of hem recovered hath hys make, 
Ful blissful mowe they synge when they wake: 
Now welcome, somer, with thy sonne softe, 
That hast this wintres wedres overshake, 
And driven away the longe nyghtes blake!"

(11. 680-92)

This warm and delightful roundel, a most befitting climax to a poem which looks steadily at the hierarchy of love, is an immediate reward for Nature's faith in her creatures. It is a tribute of love to the Goddess of Light and Love. It anticipates a new life, a new love to come, a love which
is both a creative and harmonizing force stirring the world with perennial joy. In this joyous song the soft sunlight of summer drives away the long black night of winter; a love that seeks the good of others (amor rationalis) is displacing a love that is self-centered (amor sensitivus). Spiritual love will become the vitalizing force in man's world much as it became an instrument for good in St. Valentine's world. The martyr Valentine reaches the "blysful place" by giving all he has to God, by literally losing his life. Man can attain divine love through a route other than martyrdom, through a path other than the one prescribed by Scipio Africanus. Thus the roundel declares lyrically that earthly love is basically good, that marriage and sexual pleasure are bona fide ways to God as long as they do not become ends in themselves. An infinite variety of gradations and intensities and degrees of involvement is possible, and man's capacity to love grows by loving.

All this, however, is a dream, and the narrator must be awakened:

And with the shoutyng, whan the song was do
That foules maden at here flyght awey,
I wok, and othere bokes tok me to,
To reede upon, and yit I rede alwey.
I hope, ywis, to rede so som day
That I shal mete som thyng for to fare
The bet, and thus to rede I nyl not spare.

(11. 693-99)
To the sleeper startled to reality by the "noise" of a dream, the cheerful song of the birds would sound like shouting. Their joyous clamor should not be taken as the "parliamentary turmoil of worldings" and, accordingly, a final gibe by Chaucer at the "vanity of the world and of the lovers of the world." It is more than likely the poet's attempt to reorient the dreamer to a waking perspective. Otherwise, it is difficult to account for the unqualified reassurance of love in the roundel. This simple conclusion returns the reader to the beginning of the poem and recalls the narrator's statement that though he has not experienced love "in dede" and does not know its "dreadful joye," he has studied it long in authoritative books and desires sometime to understand it. Now again the narrator hopefully turns to other books to teach him more of the mysteries of love. He resumes his study neither because he is absolutely frustrated with the enigmatic subject of love, nor because he is completely disgruntled with the way love operates, but because he wants to investigate the notion of common profit in greater depth. Derek S. Brewer states that at the end of the Parliament of Fowles "the

12 Robertson, p. 144."
reader is left to draw his own conclusions." I believe that Chaucer, whose own position finds full expression in the goddess Nature, wishes the reader to concur that common profit is the best form of love. He, like the persona and Chaucer himself, must discover its most practical forms and these he should seek to implement.

CONCLUSION

It should be apparent that if the reader comes to the *Parliament of Fowls* with his awareness heightened by a study of medieval culture, particularly with some grasp of hierarchical patterns of thought, he has a greater chance of understanding the many systems of the poem: its principles of structure, its successive dramatic action, and its doctrinal content. Hierarchisms in the poem help to establish both a proper point of view and an openness of mind to forms of literary structure which might otherwise be missed. In short, they are an essential part of the architecture and the texture of the poem. Viewing the poem chiefly through the hierarchy of love, I have tried to account for its total unity, the main point of disagreement among commentators, and to show the extent to which this simplified method of looking at the universe was intelligible to Chaucer's general audience as well as how it could have aided them in organizing the disparate elements of experience.
More specifically, the principal objective of this study has been to explain the unified approach Chaucer takes to the poem through a close scrutiny of the hierarchical levels of love. The serious questioning of love's ambivalent nature begins with the narrator's epigrammatic focusing on this idea in the opening sententia and is expanded in the Somnium section (11. 15-169) to deal expressly with the love signified by common profit. Although I have chosen to concentrate on the underlying vein of philosophic-religious seriousness permeating the poem, my choice in no way should be construed as a disaffirmation of the Parliament's definite humorous motif, which is plainly visible in Chaucer's election to introduce the subject of the common good, the highest level of earthly love, through his comic portrayal of Scipio Africanus. This dictatorial Stoic philosopher has all the tragic potential of a misanthrope and could be used by a poet less aligned with mankind to point out man's deplorable inconsistencies. Tragic intensity is absent because of Chaucer's acceptance of the propositions that pleasure and enjoyment of life are inherently good, that in man's movement to divine love there is definitely a place for the more human forms of love.

Even though Chaucer is determined to mollify the
harshness of Africanus' directive to strive for immortality, he agrees wholeheartedly that the reality of love is to be judged by its power to help man escape from imprisonment within himself. Man is not a solitary creature. Since he is gregarious, his most fundamental obligation is to develop a loving attitude towards his fellow man. To the extent that "commune profit" has ascendancy over "synguler profit," man is successful in his attempts to go beyond himself. And so in this first section of the poem Chaucer via his charming caricature of Africanus establishes the entirely selfless love of the common good (amor rationalis) as the highest earthly criterion towards which man should exert himself if he is to be united with Love Himself. While the old stoic in his impatience wants man to spring directly to God, Chaucer recognizes the total impossibility of such an immediate transcendence. Consequently, he allows man to progress through the various stages of more human love, but at no time does Chaucer condone love which is an end in itself. The poet would find fault with the tendency of some critics—for example, D. W. Robertson and Charles O. MacDonald—to polarize, to separate unabridgedly all types of self-seeking love from those of altruistic love. As long as love has some inclination towards common betterment, Chaucer would not
relegate it to utter darkness.

Chaucer is a great comic poet, and in the Somnium section he is not above making himself, through his foolishly simple and bungling fictional narrator, the constant butt of abuse. The obliquity derived from this unassuming pose throws the reader so far off balance that he is always hesitant in deciding whether wisdom is really speaking or whether it is actually the very naive questioner who is before him. This identification between author and persona has at least a two-fold significance. First of all, Chaucer admits he also shares his narrator's inability to penetrate love's ambivalence, and second, it suggests strongly that Chaucer is aware of a close human link between himself and his audience. Beneath the mask of the comic guise lies Chaucer's own imperfect human nature, which enables him both to see the world in humorous perspective and to empathize with his characters and his audience.

In the second section of the Parliament the hierarchy of love expands to include love according to nature or essence (ll. 170-210) and the self-indulgent love found in the darkness of Venus' temple (ll. 211-94). When the dreamer-narrator is thrust into the exotic and well-arranged Garden of Love, since nature is fulfilling its proper func-
tion according to its place on the Boethian chain of love, he is shocked by the supersensible felicity which unfolds before him. Chaucer depicts this paradisiacal enclosure to typify the peace and delight that can be characteristic of man's nature if he orders it by maintaining the careful balance between his animal and rational parts. In other words, the secret to man's happiness resides in the complete development of each component of his essence. Too much stress on rationality leaves man emotionally cold and sterile, to wit, Scipio Africanus, and heavy emphasis on animality dehumanizes man by making him too conscious of his body and its gratifications.

By guiding the reader through the domain of the lascivious goddess Venus and her multitude of sensual stooges, Chaucer next outlines the forces animalizing man's nature. Though many of the allegorical figures and much of the machinery of Venus' temple are taken straight from Boccaccio's Teseida, the poet Chaucer judiciously borrows only those ideas which further his own purpose. This is shown best in how he utilizes the highly artificial personifications to complement his allegory of the depraved will. Clearly, the love represented here sinks to the lower end of the hierarchy. Chaucer further insinuates the barrenness and selfish sensuality of amor sensitivus in his portrait of
Venus, whom he puts at the nadir of a beam of light emanating from the Supreme Being. In a poem replete with light imagery—from the golden letters beckoning man to the quest for love, to the clear natural sunlight of the Garden of Love, to the dynamic brilliance of Nature, to the summer light of the final roundel—the setting of Venus "in a prive corner" has major importance. Flickering fires in a place of darkness far below God are readily associated with hell. This connection is one that Chaucer wants his audience to make since it is not only an adequate commentary on the severe moral dangers peculiar to this degree of love, but also emblematic of the torturous route the absolutely libidinous man must follow to succeed constantly at sensual love. The earthly Venus may symbolize the unproductiveness of ego-centered love, but Chaucer does not wean her from the milk of human sympathy that he usually accords fallen man. Because he is not righteously condemnatory and prefers to bring out the odiousness of the goddess' minions, especially Priapus and the women in disheveled clothes, Chaucer sketches her unattractiveness and sterility with a few light strokes. With Venus and what she symbolizes the descent is made to the lowest gradation of love. Accordingly the poet's hierarchical design is complete; the two extremes of amor
rationalis and amor sensitivus are delicately balanced with amor naturalis.

The parliament of birds, monitored and guided by the celestial goddess Nature, fills out the last major section of the poem (11. 295-692). Before examining the great debate between the higher and lower social classes of fowls, Chaucer first assesses the exact role the goddess has in the cosmic schema. Her most official task as "vicar of the almighty" is to oversee the system of laws by which the whole created universe operates. Autonomous in her domain, Nature governs the order and beauty of the world, its multitudinous grades of perfection, its scale of worth, and this she accomplishes by binding all creation with an unbreakable bond of love. Since she is responsible for the procreation and perpetuation of the phenomenal world and since man is her chief charge, her primary burden is to keep wayward man on a steady moral course so that he can attain divine love through the intermediary stages of human love. In the exercise of this chore, Nature is truly maternal, not a termagant. She has the capacity to understand sin and likewise demonstrates an acute perception of human action and motivation. Accordingly, she always reprimands the sinner with a watchful eye on his human requirements. To her credit she can distinguish between the
gradual servile debasement of self which identifies the lovers of Venus and the more elevating person-centered relationships. When she is confronted with man's selfish inhumanity to man, Nature is unafraid to anathematize him. She refuses to toy with subtleties, and if man errs grievously, she lets him know about it. Since the goddess has little to say about the moral state of the birds, she must be satisfied with their conduct. Through procreation Nature not only sponsors love, but also through her benevolent actions evinces a perpetual love for man. Assuredly, in a poem dedicated to love she is its perfect embodiment. Finally, whenever man (the fowls) puts serious obstacles in the way of common profit, Nature can be counted on to intervene in favor of the higher forms of amor rationalis. In truth, the goddess Nature is the perfect spokesman for Chaucer because of her optimistic humanism.

More to the point, this insight into Nature's personality is necessary for a proper evaluation of the levels of love, that is, the degree of common profit, reflected by the fowls in their great debate. The fact that the goddess fails to accuse any bird of lust indicates their commitment to love is in some sense positive. It is not wholly self-seeking, or immoral, or negative, as D. W. Robertson would have us believe, but is a type of amor rationalis.
The love the three tercels profess for the beautiful formel, though expressed in the language of courtly love, is a genuine concern for her. Inasmuch as none of the eagles is afraid to lower himself before the other fowls by an open declaration of love, each is consciously fighting the natural tendency to make himself the center of the universe. Moreover, to deny the essential truthfulness of their protestations is to cast doubt on the veracity of mankind in general. It must be conceded that the royal tercels are imperfect, but individual differences or quirks of character cannot be taken as signs of moral deformity. Their love for the formel rises substantially above that displayed in Venus' temple and, therefore, places them along the hierarchical route to God.

Once the boisterous debate begins in earnest, the lower classes of birds occupy the stage the majority of the time. Except for the sensitive turtle-dove, these commoners voice their sentiments on the subject of love with an appalling lack of propriety. The poem at this point focuses doubly on love: the solutions which they propose and their own meager contributions to the common good. Their solutions of the problem may not be ours, but who is to say, if implemented, they will not foster the parliament's mutual interest. Hence, their love participates in amor rationalis and
becomes more spiritually fruitful as it progresses towards other-centeredness. However, the failure of each social class to understand the viewpoint of the others is the biggest hurdle to a common accord. Instead of making this observation directly and solemnly, Chaucer takes the most effective means of getting man to laugh at himself—comedy. He teaches with delight by having the birds pose as human counterparts. Under this indirection the reader learns a major reason for communal disorder and is not so seared by the accusing finger that he becomes indignant and passive. When the sleeper awakes from the dream-vision, he continues, with an optimistic frame of mind, to research the topic of love.

In short, Chaucer structures the Parliament of Fowls according to the three most important hierarchical forms of love: *amor naturalis*, *amor sensitivus*, and *amor rationalis*. Nature, Goddess of Light and Love, directs the activities of the assembly in its exercise of common profit. By exploiting the comic possibilities of human situations and characters, he produces a poem which is a delicate balance of philosophy and humor.
A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Brewer, Derek S. *Chaucer.* London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1953.


Speirs, John.  *Chaucer the Maker.*  London: Faber and Faber, 1940.


Periodicals


_______. "What Is the Parlement of Foules?" Studien zur Englischen Philologie, 50 (1913), 279-90.


Pratt, Robert A. "Chaucer Borrowing from Himself." Modern Language Quarterly, 7 (1946), 259-64.

_______. "Chaucer's Use of the Teseida." PMLA, 62 (1947), 605-08.


Reid, Mary E. "The Historical Interpretation of the Parlement of Foules." University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature, 18 (1923), 60-70.


Shackford, Martha. "The Date of Chaucer's Hous of Fame." Modern Language Notes, 31 (1916), 507-08.


VITA

Emil A. Mucchetti was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1938. Upon his graduation from Augustinian Academy, Staten Island, New York, he entered Villanova University, where he received the B. A. degree cum laude in 1961. After completing a tour of duty with the United States Army and working in industry several years, he accepted a graduate assistantship at the University of Texas at El Paso and graduated with the M. A. degree in English in 1965. He is presently teaching at Texas A & I University, Kingsville, Texas.
EXAMINATION AND THESIS REPORT

Candidate: Emil A. Mucchetti

Major Field: English

Title of Thesis: Hierarchical Modes of Love in Chaucer's The Parliament of Fowls

Approved:

[Signature]
Major Professor and Chairman

[Signature]
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signature]

[Signature]

[Signature]

[Signature]

Date of Examination:

November 27, 1971