

THE NARRATOR IN THE MIDDLE ENGLISH BIRD DEBATES

A DYNAMIC CONVENTION

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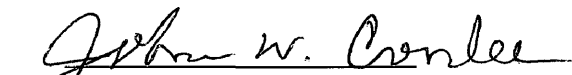
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I dedicate this work to the flora and fauna of Williamsburg, Virginia.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the role of the narrator in the Middle English bird debate poems. Seven poems, both major and minor, are considered, most notably Chaucer's Parliament of Fowls, Clanvowe's "The Cuckoo and the Nightingale," the anonymous The Owl and the Nightingale, and "A Parliament of Birds." I also briefly consider, in addition to the seven Middle English works, two French poems in the bird debate genre, relating them to Chaucer's poem, which they possibly influenced.

Through a close study of poetic form and comparison of the poems with each other and other works of literature I examined the narrator's introductory and concluding comments and all points between. I was able to draw certain conclusions about how these narrational comments help the reader in interpreting the outcome of the bird debates as well as how they enhance the general tone and aesthetic qualities of the poem.

The narrator, usually an emotionally beleaguered courtly gentleman, sometimes makes little comment and affirms the bird debate's result, either by concluding with silence or a brief closing passage. In some poems he participates in the debate by favoring one bird or even taking on a bird by himself. Sometimes he is comically undermined by the poet, acting as silly as the debating birds or failing to learn anything from the debate.

Regardless of his role, the narrator reinforces the tone of the poem whether it is comic, serious, or melancholy. The narrator is usually the key to how the reader should interpret the poems, as opposed to the debate itself. Though the presence of a narrator is conventional, the roles these narrators play in the poems vary, showing the convention's flexibility in the hands of creatively modulating poets.

THE NARRATOR IN THE MIDDLE ENGLISH BIRD DEBATES
A DYNAMIC CONVENTION

The Middle English bird debates, Judith Davidoff observes, are *chansons d'aventure*, narrated and framed tales or dialogues derived from literary forms common in Latin and French (41). Apart from Chaucer's Parliament of Fowls and the anonymous The Owl and the Nightingale, these poems have received little critical attention; and the poems have even more rarely been considered in relation to one another. This thesis will compare the Middle English bird debates on the basis of one formal aspect they all share—a first-person narrator who introduces and often participates in the narrative. Often, the narrator, because of some problem or dilemma, wanders alone out into a natural spring or summer setting where he overhears birds discussing the very topic he has been wrestling with (see Sandison 26-35). Davidoff believes this narrator who wanders in the countryside is an Everyman seeking universal truth for all humankind (41). As she argues, seeing the common spring setting and beleaguered narrator at the beginning of a poem serves as "a signal marker pointing the way for all men toward an enlightening experience" (59). Both Davidoff and Helen Sandison remind us that these frames were a long-established convention and were not literal truth; we must not "visualize the countryside in May littered with poets rapt or insensate beside tree-shaded streams" (Davidoff 38; see also Sandison 96-7).

This convention of having a narrator and a framing device was probably introduced into Latin debate poems during the eleventh century, adding a complex dimension to many of these poems (Conlee xiv). Sandison, in her dissertation on the

chansons d'aventure, says that this device began appearing in French literature in the twelfth century and went on to England in the fourteenth (3-4, 1). Sandison identifies what she believes to be the two distinguishing features of the convention: "The poet introduces himself by means of a short narrative preface; he pretends that he himself witnesses or participates in the action that he reports" (2). The only flaw in this definition is that it fails to notice that the poet and narrator in a few of the poems appear to be distinct entities, which can add still another dimension to the poem.

As John Conlee explains, both the French and Middle English poems often used "talking birds as counselors or as foils to foolish or despondent human beings" (xxii-xxiii). Specifically to this thesis, "talking birds became a device for expressing a variety of human attitudes towards love" (Conlee xxii). Kathryn Hume discusses the choice of medieval writers to use bird protagonists rather than humans and concludes that the birds comically distanced the particular poet from his audience, universalized the argument, made the atmosphere less preachy and upsetting and more entertaining, and allowed the poet to maneuver the plot and dialogue in ways that might not have been acceptable to the (then officially undiscovered) laws of physics and social decorum (25, 28). Hume also notes that these birds often seem "weaker-minded" than humans, often resulting in ridiculous arguments that are amusing to us (26). However, in a late example, "The Clerk and the Nightingale," it is the Clerk, not the avian disputant, who is made to look foolish. Because many medievals believed that the universe "was an orderly series of parallel, integrated hierarchies," it was perfectly legitimate to believe that "the animal world . . . was divinely provided to set forth examples for humanity" (Owen 268; Harrison 24). In

the Middle English bird debates, though, no matter how much the humans may learn from the birds, the reader is always ultimately dependent upon the presentation of the debate by poet and, in turn, the narrator.

Rather than what Malcolm Andrew amusingly calls the "general avian moralizing" (33), I wish to focus on the roles of the narrators in these Middle English bird debate poems. In a genre where the debating opponents may end up agreeing, be judged by an outside party, or leave the question up in the air, it is useful in interpreting these poems to see how the narrator functions. When readers read a poem beginning, "As I fared forth one fresh May morn...", they may be inclined to dismiss such a framing narrative as trite and clichéd and not worthy of much attention. There is, however, much flexibility within this framing narrative form, and the narrator and his treatment by the poet can be valuable in determining the debate's tone, whether it be comic, serious, religious, etc. The narrator also contributes to the aesthetic qualities of the poem and, most importantly, the narrator is the key to how a bird debate should be interpreted by the reader.

The works discussed in this paper will be bird debates from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, including Geoffrey Chaucer's Parliament of Fowls, John Clanvowe's "The Cuckoo and the Nightingale," William Dunbar's "The Merle and the Nightingale," and the anonymous "The Thrush and the Nightingale," The Owl and the Nightingale, "The Clerk and the Nightingale," and "A Parliament of Birds." I will also briefly consider two French poems, Jean de Condé's La Messe des Oisiaus and Oton de Grandson's "Le Songe Saint Valentin," poems that may have influenced Chaucer and

others in their use of this particular form.

Specifically, I will focus on such details as the narrator's comments (or their absence) throughout the poem, the tags the narrator uses to describe the birds and their speeches, how much space the narrator occupies in the poem, and how the narrator's state of mind may even put words into the birds' beaks. I will also consider the poet's references (through the narrator) to other works of literature, including other bird debates. Carrying the analysis a step further, I will analyze the aesthetic and didactic effectiveness of the narrator in the various poems as well as briefly look at the complex relation between the debaters, narrator, poet, and reader. Most importantly, no matter what the size of his role, the narrator plays a large part in affirming or challenging the result of the bird debates. He often is the key to "judging" the birds' disputes (rather than the debate itself).

i

"The Thrush and the Nightingale," the first of the poems to be considered (though not the earliest), was written in the late thirteenth century. This poem is a fairly uninteresting and essentially neutral narrational case, a poem much along the same lines as its earlier Latin and French antecedents (Conlee 237). The narrator makes no comment after the debate, hence only silently approving of what conclusion the birds have reached. Like several of the others, this debate is between one bird who is a "disillusioned cynic" and one who is a "romantic idealist" (Conlee xxiii). The Thrush takes his usual role of maligning and the Nightingale hers of defending women, in this case finally mentioning

the divine virtue of Mary as a defense for all women. Whatever the reasons and believability of the Thrush's finally siding with the Nightingale, there is the question of narrational function.

This 192-line poem has an opening frame of eighteen lines, but no closing one. The first ten lines are quite conventional--another tale of summer and birds debating. "Somers is comen with loue to toun" is the first line, tipping us off that the important matter at hand is love and, by implication, women. This may be a slight celebratory nod towards the Nightingale's position, but as we see by the poem's end, it is not so much earthly love that is being celebrated but rather devotion to Mary. The narrator gives us a short profile of the opinions of the disputants--the Nightingale is there to "shilden" women from criticism, while the Thrush thinks all women "fendes." Apart from this rather unrevealing introduction, the narrator only speaks for himself twice more, and that only in the form of benign one-line introductions to two of the Nightingale's speeches. The narrator keeps the secret of the "surprise ending" of the Nightingale's invocation of Mary as a counter to the Thrush's copious historical examples of men ruined by bad women.

The Thrush changes his mind, and so no narrator is needed to judge the case. The poet and narrator seem to be one and the same, and the narrator as poet faithfully reports the debate, we assume, and implicitly supports the outcome by saying nothing. As Thomas Reed points out, we have witnessed, in the debate's finale, a miracle similar to Mary's role in history; the Nightingale's sudden and total victory are "cleverly mimetic of Mary's 'superlogical' role" (Reed 208). Mary, and by extension womankind, is exalted

and cleared of all guilt in both birds' eyes, but readers are left to decide for themselves whether they are willing accept the example of Mary as proof of the good in all women (Owen 417). Conlee suggests that the poet himself probably intended "to venerate the Blessed Virgin more than to praise the goodness of women in general," and I agree with this (Conlee 237-8). We virtually forget about the original subject of the whole vituperative debate when we turn in awe to look upon the purity and goodness of Mary.

In regard to tone and aesthetics, this narrator contributes very little. The first line is attractive and cheerful, but the poem's introduction consists of only four meager verses of natural description, followed by an unnecessary preview of the two birds' positions. The real interest in this poem, as briefly commented on by Reed and Hume, is the actual bird debate. This is actually an exception to the general rule, as we shall see.

ii

The Owl & the Nightingale, an earlier poem than "The Thrush and the Nightingale," is a complex work of the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, and it seems to have had little direct influence on the other poems discussed in this paper. Nonetheless, it is the earliest framing fiction poem in English (Davidoff 82) and offers a more interesting narrative case than does "The Thrush and the Nightingale." The critical debate surrounding this poem for which we have no certain date, author, or audience has been intense; and in regard to the poem's purpose, it has, in the words of Reed, been subject to "various procrustean interpreters" (219). I will not pretend that I have solved the problems of this poem here, but I think the role of the narrator does reinforce my view

(which derives mostly from Reed's and Hume's), that, as Reed says, the poem offers a recreational, mimetic study of the variousness of human opinion and experience, with a nod (as Hume argues) towards a corrective against human contentiousness. The narrator enforces Reed's conclusion since he, for all his commenting, offers us no guideline as to which bird we ought to side with. The narrator also, adding to Hume's argument, is made to look foolish, albeit less so than the birds. His willingness to take the bird's debate seriously and the maxims he offers them in advice render the whole proceeding that much more farcical.

As Lewis and Nancy Owen point out in the introduction of their anthology, one reason that animals are used as protagonists for these debate poems is so that they can remind people "to shun that part of themselves which they share with the beasts as they embrace and perfect those qualities which they share with the angelic ranks above them" (268). The boisterous Owl and Nightingale are amusing, relatively harmless, but still negative role models if we look at the poem in this way. They resemble, as Hume points out, Swift's Lilliputian Big and Little Endians in their self-importance over their silly dispute (116). The only difference is that Swift's characters at least have a definite dispute on their hands while these birds seem to enjoy argument for its own sake and flit from topic to topic. As Paull Baum says, "Their differences [are] differences of temperament, not untouched here and there by temper" (vii).

Critic after critic has pointed out the illogicalities of the disputants' arguments (see Schleusener and Gardner, for instance). Suffice it to say that each bird will seemingly stop at nothing to defeat her opponent, whether it be verbal abuse about such unsavory

topics as toilet habits, threats of physical abuse, name-calling, and more substantial but still poorly argued subjects as the respective birds' worths to human beings and even their usefulness after death. While we get the general impression that the Owl is more sombre and conservative and the Nightingale more given to jollity and lightness, we are offered no indication in the text as to which of these is the superior virtue. As Reed concludes, the birds and their arguments are presented with "baffling equivocality" (239).

Fanning the flames of all this bafflement is what I would call an informal and sporadic narrator who offers no insight into how we should interpret the whole proceedings. This narrator introduces the poem, comments off and on throughout, and concludes the poem with an even less satisfying conclusion than Chaucer's narrator in Parliament, for here the narrator confesses that he does not know which bird is finally judged the winner of the dispute. All in all, I estimate that the narrator speaks in less than ten percent of the poem's 1794 lines; but he does intrude enough to have some influence on our reading of the poem.

The poem begins in a straightforward manner with the narrator saying he shall tell us of a "sval" (l.7), or an extremely passionate debate, he overheard one day. If there is any ostensible topic of this debate, the narrator says, it concerns their songs (l.11). This is hardly the case, it is the god-given nature of the birds themselves that is really in conflict. This concern manifests itself in arguments about their songs, their dwellings, and their general usefulness and morality. Hume emphasizes that the narrator makes it clear that we are listening to a heated, silly fight between two birds, and so that we should not take the debate too seriously (89). Several critics have also noticed that this narrator

uses legal terms such as "plaiding" in the introduction (Palmer 312, Hume 89). There is a possibility that the narrator is a member of the legal profession, but more likely, as Hume argues, he is mockingly characterizing the dispute, and in turn humans, perhaps those who engage in frivolous lawsuits. Reed believes that the use of legal terms by the narrator may also indicate that the intended audience were arbiters of some sort, whether secular nobles or clerical officials, who enjoyed the poem and its inconclusiveness as respite from the pressures of judging disputes all day (259).

The Nightingale begins the debate first singing, then crudely insulting the Owl. If anything, though, in these first lines there is perhaps a slight bias towards the Nightingale. The Nightingale's song is praised by the narrator as sounding like a harp or pipe, but apart from this the narrator seems to be a mere recorder of events at this point. The Owl somehow contains her anger, and it is difficult to feel direct sympathy for this cruel, unprovoked Nightingale.¹ Any sympathy we have for the Owl, however, is dispelled as soon as she speaks, as Reed notes (231). In fact, the narrator calls her a ranting "fule" (l.32), and then the Owl proceeds to physically threaten the much smaller bird.

The birds continue to trade insults and the narrator continues to say little, until lines 139 to 149, where he describes the Owl's angry reaction to another of her opponent's speeches. Often, as in these lines, the narrator seems gifted with the ability to indicate the birds' states of mind (Hume 98). But there is another slight comment here--the Nightingale's voice is again compared to a harp, but not with any positive implications, for it is "lude and so scharpe" (l. 141). If there was any positive implication in the earlier reference to the harp, it has now been undermined by this less pleasant assertion by the

narrator.

The narration then consists only of objective dialogue tags until a longer passage, ll. 391-410, where the Owl's arguments render the Nightingale temporarily uneasy. R. Barton Palmer says these lines favor the Owl (315), but Reed thinks we are getting an "unusually 'interior'" glimpse (for the poem's era) into the Nightingale's thought processes, which is directly followed by one of the Nightingale's best speeches (224). The particular speech of the Owl's (in which she justifies her nocturnal habits by dubiously comparing herself with other animals) puts the Nightingale at a loss. Dubious also is the claim that her song is superior to the Nightingale's. So the narrator, according to Reed, is reporting the thoughts of a Nightingale who fails to detect the inadequacies of the Owl's arguments (235). Reed also sees the narrator clearly being undermined here, for the narrator thinks the Owl's speech is a profound one (235-6), while Reed thinks it is nonsense. At this point, the narrator also begins to adopt the proverbial style that the birds often use when they quote King Alfred's pithy statements. At first these quotations are impressive, but as Hume observes, as they pile up they become funnier and contradictory (120). The two birds are joined by the narrator in their armchair moralizing. Still, it is unclear whether the thoughts are observations by the narrator himself or are his reporting of the small bird's own thought processes. In any case, the doubts of the Nightingale are followed by a parallel passage about the Owl's doubts after her opponent's speech (ll.467-472). The Owl is characterized as afraid, just as the Nightingale was before her speech. But both birds are determined, overcome their fears, and continue to press the debate.

The narrator is now silent until lines 659 to 706, where he once again has a long speech relating to the Nightingale's inner emotions. This passage has been much discussed by critics and resembles the passages we just considered. Again, the Nightingale is in anxious doubt over the Owl's latest speech, which is even more ridiculous than her earlier ones, this time nobly comparing humans using nearby outhouses to young Owls defecating in their nests. Jay Schleusener focuses upon this narrational passage and says that the narrator gives almost contradictory "advice" to the little bird--on the one hand saying that it is easy to go astray when one speaks against the heart or truth, and on the other hand, that wit is sharpest when one's back is against the wall (186). Then the narrator, like the birds, becomes foolishly sententious and begins quoting Alfred (Palmer 315). After this lengthy passage, the Nightingale gives a strange reply about her virtue when she says that her one song outweighs all the Owl's claims of multifarious benefits to humankind, but also that she is clever and devious (Schleusener 188-89). Again, the lines which lead up to this speech (ll.701-6) make us wonder who is providing these convoluted proverbs--is it the narrator or the bird? It seems to be the narrator, but the Nightingale is said to have considered her response thoughtfully, perhaps mulling over the points the narrator has just mentioned.

A near duplicate of this passage occurs in lines 933-954. The narrator tells us how the Nightingale is feeling, and then at line 942 breaks into more advice-giving, ending the narration saying that "The Nightingale hi understod" (l.951) the wisdom the narrator has just related. It does seem that the narrator is telling us his own thoughts about the situation, yet at the same time these seem to be the exact thoughts the

Nightingale is entertaining. As the debate "progresses," the birds grow angrier and angrier (ll. 1043-44, 1067-1074). The narrator reveals the Nightingale's lack of confidence again in lines 1291-1297, and in lines 1511-1515 he tells of the Owl's confidence at an apparent mistake by the Nightingale. Until now the narrator has been reporting the doubts of the Nightingale and telling a little about the Owl's doubts and anger, perhaps indicating a relative weakness in the small bird's arguments. The reader, though, finds little reason for the Nightingale to lose confidence, for her words seem neither better nor worse than the Owl's.

Just when the Owl appears ready to snatch the palm and the narrator tells of her confidence, she almost bumbles the debate, or at least so the Nightingale thinks (ll. 1515-1634). The Owl ends up defending the adultery that earlier she had said the Nightingale sinfully encourages; then she ridiculously claims that her "gode song" consoles the lonely, loyal wives while their husbands are off at war. The Owl ends up drawing a parallel between Christ and herself when she says that she is useful (as a scarecrow) to humans even after she is dead (often having been killed by these same people); the Nightingale, she adds, is worthless when dead.

The Nightingale, eagerly seizing on this (as well as setting it slightly askew), claims victory by the fact that the Owl is paradoxically proud of her own shameful death. Of course, as Hume reminds us, just because someone is victorious does not mean that they are "fundamentally superior" (40). And besides, the Nightingale is not the official victor yet, no matter how the other little birds rally around her. The Owl now threatens the Nightingale with violence, but the narrator lets us know that this is an empty threat,

using a tone similar to the one used when describing the Nightingale's doubts (ll.1707-1716).

The narrator then introduces a new figure into the poem--the Wren, a figure of some wisdom and authority who has been taught near the homes of humans. This little bird urges peace and reminds the disputants to await the verdict of Nicholas, whom they earlier decided should be their arbiter (l.1717-1738). All three birds then break out into general praise of this Nicholas, and the poem ends with the Owl and Nightingale flying off together in search of him and his unbounded wisdom. The poem ends with the not so helpful narrator confessing, "Ne can ich eu na more telle / Her nis na more of this spelle" (ll.1793-4).

I have already mentioned my view of the poem, which is a mixture of Reed's and Hume's, though we cannot ignore Palmer, who sceptically says that "the poem does not authorize us either to name its subject or its conclusions"(319). The poem's theme does not make itself known without some thought. Hume calls the poem a "burlesque-satire on human contentiousness" which, although distanced by using bird protagonists, alludes to human disputes and reaches climax in the birds' discussions of their deaths (98-110). Some of the issues are serious, but the setting and proceedings are not, and hence we have an entertaining didactic poem where the birds somehow agree to peaceably submit to arbitration (we hope) (Hume 99, 111). The poem does offer a "reproach to *any* human quarrel so idiotic as to bear comparison to this one" (107), yet the purpose of the poem lies beyond this. Reed, as I mentioned earlier, sees the poem as a recreational one to be enjoyed by beleaguered arbiters and for people who could just step back and marvel at the

varieties of human experience and be entertained by the opinions embodied by the two birds (254-60). The legal phrases used by the narrator early in the poem as well as their willingness to have their dispute settled by an unbiased judge support this view. In real life all cases must be judged finally-- even if both disputants are as annoying and foolish as the Owl and the Nightingale.

One of the reasons why Reed does not see the poem as explicitly didactic in Hume's way is that the narrator is such a puzzling figure who contributes to the confusion of interpretation--he never really condemns the birds for fighting (248). But the narrator does help to enforce Hume's point in another, less obvious way--the narrator adds to the satire on human contentiousness when he begins commenting on the birds' states of mind and over-seriously considering their debating strategies. Palmer notes the whole "oscillating tone" of the poem and also links this tone with the narrator, who, he adds, "renders 'correct' interpretation impossible, because his view of the action is inconsistent," first seeming to favor one bird, then another, and finally ending with neutrality (311). But perhaps Palmer credits the narrator with too much, for I do not think that his comments indicate that he *ever* sides with anyone in particular-- he seems merely to be reporting on developments in the crazed debate he is witnessing. Neither the beginning or end show any judgment whatsoever on the part of the narrator, and his comments in the midst of the debate are random intrusions of another, albeit watered-down, Alfred-quoting bird-like figure. If they are not this, then they resemble omniscient narrator comments outlining the thoughts of the disputants, sporadically placed by a poet who had little concern about the role his narrator filled. The former seems likely to me--

perhaps the author was some noble or cleric slightly lamenting his own role as judge through the narrator and the eager flight of the birds to poor Nicholas who will have to settle the whole mess.

Compared to the narrator of "The Thrush and the Nightingale," this narrator is ubiquitous, and yet his role is not so different, either. He contributes to the confusion we feel while listening to the debating birds of the poem, and also, by his negative example, to the desire we feel to get away from the foolish disputes (and their narrators or reporters) that we encounter in real life. The only real difference is that he also serves as a reporter of the type that Chaucer represented in his Parliament of Fowls. The interest in this debate is, again, more the birds than the narrator, but at least in this poem he is more active than in the last. The remaining poems in this thesis raise the level of the narrator's role and he effectively gains much of the reader's attention.

iii

Chaucer's Parliament of Fowls is renowned for its complexity, its allusiveness, and most especially, its elusiveness. Before venturing onto much trodden critical ground, I wish to consider two possible Old French bird debate antecedents of Chaucer's poem in order to broaden the base of the study and to show how Chaucer and the other English poets modified the role of the narrator in their poems.² The primary role of the narrators of is that of a loquacious (and pretty dull) explicator of exactly what the poet is trying to get across in the poem. Unlike the narrator of the poem we have just looked at, these narrators seem to know what they are talking about and are not undermined in the least by

the poet, who they implicitly represent. Both poems are also largely serious in tone, unlike most of the English ones, where even in the more serious examples there is witty verbal abuse between the sparring birds.

La Messe des Oisiaus, by Jean de Condé (ca.1275-1345), is a lengthy and elaborate dream-vision about love that is narrated by an experienced lover who really loves love, as it were. He falls asleep and has a lengthy dream of birds celebrating a mass for Venus, the goddess of love. Despite some slight comic interference by a cuckoo, the birds participate joyfully in the mass and praise Venus gloriously. After the mass, the narrator joins in a love feast, indulging himself in generous helpings of dew-eyed "looks" and love potions; he even steals a kiss from "Memory." Following this a love debate occurs, but the disputants are not the birds, but grey nuns and cannonesses.

The most significant part of "La Messe," in regard to its framing elements, is the ending (116-19), when the narrator presents a detailed explanation of his allegorical dream. The whole "messe," he explains, has been an allegory of heavenly, not earthly, love. He suggests that his reader, if he is a member of the church establishment, should serve God only and not Venus. But, if his reader is a member of secular society, then he should serve Venus, but only through the God-sanctioned institution of marriage. Jean's explanation for the earthly sheen of his tale is that "the wise can draw the moral and the fools can be entertained" (118). The poem ends with a call for true and eternal love in God's name. Such explicit elucidation by a narrator is unlike anything that occurs in any of the Middle English bird debates, either they are poems where the message is clear and have no need of explanation, such as "The Thrush and the Nightingale," or, more

commonly, poems where the audience is left to puzzle it out for themselves, such as The Owl and the Nightingale and The Parliament of Fowls.

Oton de Grandson (c.1340-1397), the author of "Le Songe Saint Valentin," was a close contemporary of Chaucer, and it is not clear whether his poem was written before or after Chaucer's "Parliament" (Conlee xxxiii). J.A.W. Bennett thinks that either Grandson or Chaucer was the first poet to celebrate Saint Valentine's Day (135) and calls the former's poem "formal, if not flat" (137). Nevertheless, it does have elements that may be pertinent to Chaucer's bird debate. The poem is prefaced with an epigraph concerning the virtues of thought, repose, and memory, and the narrator begins the poem by relating how he enjoys solving dilemmas by sleeping on them. Like Chaucer's narrator, he witnesses within his dream a Valentine's Day mating session, but this session is one presided over by a female eagle, not the goddess Natura, as in Chaucer's poem. Here she calls to a lone peregrine falcon to join in the general mating, but he refuses politely, for he is hopelessly in love with a tame, courtly peregrine, and he would rather suffer for this love than settle for less.

When the narrator awakens from this dream, he expresses his discomfort about the various highs and lows that lovers experience. Interestingly, the narrator distinguishes between the love experienced by birds, which, he claims, can often be less decorous and more shallow, and that of humans, who are more inclined to be faithful and full of humility, even if they are suffering. He takes great pains to tell us how he feels for the suffering of lovers who are not only the victims of love but of societal scorn. Although not a lover by profession (as he puts it), this narrator feels definite sympathy

with those sharing the plight of the peregrine falcon, and even more so with his human counterparts. Grandson's poem ends with a prayer to the god of love and a call to women to have consideration for their poor, devoted male lovers.

There are both significant similarities and significant differences between Grandson's poem and Chaucer's Parliament of Fowls. As in Jean's poem, Grandson's narrator moralizes effusively at the end of the poem and distinguishes between the love of birds and humans. Like Chaucer's narrator, he is inexperienced, but he gets very emotionally involved in love, though not so much during the dream. The machinery and significance of the dream are simpler than in Chaucer's poem and it is the reflection after the dream that seems to be the poet's main concern. Nevertheless, the basic bird-gathering and courtly love suffering are present, and although the birds don't really debate, there is some tension in that the peregrine chooses not to lower himself by mating with just anyone. Also, in the closing passages, the narrator implies a debate between human beings when he says that people should not be so critical of lovers. Ultimately, there is much of Chaucer in Grandson and vice versa. Grandson, like de Condé before him, ends his poem with a clear reflection regarding its purpose. Although it does not attempt to resolve all the vicissitudes of love, it supports the view that courtly love is a worthy pursuit. Chaucer may imply these things in his narrative also, but if so, he does it much less clearly and the Englishman's poem, as we shall see, is shrouded in other concerns. Chaucer's poem certainly does not imitate the attempted high seriousness and straightforward moralizing of its French counterparts. He rather follows (and helps to create) the English tradition of verbal wit among the debaters and slightly undermined

narrators--narrators of more emotional complexity, and so more compelling to the reader, than we have encountered heretofore.

iv

Geoffrey Chaucer probably wrote his Parliament of Fowls in the late 1370s or early 80s, possibly for a Saint Valentine's Day celebration at the court of Richard II. This elaborate dream-vision poem has generated even more critical dispute than The Owl and the Nightingale, although here, at least, the critics agree that the poem's chief concern is with love. As in the two French poems, the narrator here plays a large role, although he has little to offer in the way of interpretation, unlike his voluble French counterparts. He tells the tale and has a fair amount to say, but finally he seems just as mystified by his visionary experience as we are. Thomas Reed sees the poem as "realistic murk and recreational mirth" (339), as he does for the The Owl and the Nightingale, Reed views this poem as a celebration of the dazzling panoply that is our experience of love. The fact that this is a sophisticated courtly poem for Valentine's Day reinforces this recreational reading.

The narrator is the main concern of the poem and before relating his dream-vision, he provides a lengthy introduction of 109 lines. The dream itself consists of nearly six hundred lines, which are then followed by a final seven-line reflection on the dream by the narrator. The dream is the largest part of the poem, and the narrator hardly dominates the dream in an active sense, but as Henry M. Leicester, in an article that anticipated some of my own views, points out, the dream is colored by the narrator's immersion in

"the multiplicity, richness and variety of the authoritative traditions, conventions, literary models, lore, etc." relating to the subject of love (18).

The depictions of love are so multifarious in literature that the narrator can come to no resolve at the poem's conclusion, much as the Formel cannot or will not decide upon a suitor near the end of the birds' parliament. The narrator is, as Davidoff observes, a passive receiver of information who is unable to come to any final resolve about his dream's meaning (124-5). Chaucer brilliantly makes the narrator the key to this poem as he shows him striving for a true insight into love. In contrast to the heavenly virtue he reads of before dreaming, no earthly experience of love can be unalloyed in its goodness. This is what the narrator should learn from his literary studies of love and the dream that they produce, but he persists in his quest of how to find a perfect love on earth, vowing to keep searching through his books until he finds the answer. Leicester calls this idealistic inaction an instance of too much thought, and that this aspect of the narrator's psyche is the reason for his and the Formel's unwillingness to participate in love at the end of the poem (19, 26, 31-2). Because Chaucer so carefully depicts the narrator and his dream we sympathize with him and also can laugh at some of his follies, seeing within him an aspect of ourselves.

Wolfgang Clemen notes that from the beginning of the poem, the paradoxical duality of love is emphasized by the narrator who is desperate to determine something solid about its nature (130). The narrator considers love a "craft so longe to lerne" (l.1), yet he himself has had no experience with love apart from his "bokes" (l.10) and at the end we are left to wonder if he will simply live his life reading about love and never

experiencing it for himself. In any case, once, while scouring his books for "a certeyn thing to lerne" (1.20), the narrator took up Macrobius's commentary on Cicero's "Dream of Scipio," which he proceeds to summarize. What this "certeyn thing to lerne" is that he is after we never learn, but perhaps it is what R. M. Lumiansky calls "true felicity," which is achieved by reconciling earthly pleasures and heavenly virtues (84). In other words, the way to have a perfect experience of earthly love without sacrificing the heavenly virtues. Dorothy Betherum agrees that the narrator is being drawn to the world of the immutable goodness of the heavens and at the same time is trying to find justification for the pleasures of the all too changeable world of human experience (520). He is unwilling to take the plunge into earthly love until he can find this justification. Scipio's dream addresses this issue in part, but the figure of Africanus is a stern Roman who favors ascetic ways and the earthly practice of individual action for the "commune profyt" (1.47,75). Thus heaven is granted to humans upon death, and Africanus emphasizes the smallness of the earth and its meaninglessness, compared to the "armony" of the heavenly spheres (1.63).

When the narrator puts down the book and retires to bed, his head is full of "busy hevynesse," for he "bothe hadde thyng which I that nolde, / And ek I ne hadde that thyng that I wolde" (ll.89-91)-- that is, he had a thing he didn't wish to have, and he didn't have the thing he wished to have. Scipio's dream has taught him something about heavenly virtue but sees little value in the "lesser" forms of love, such as physical love between men and women. Scipio's dream, no matter what its true meaning, does provide a convenient connection to the next part of the poem, which is the narrator's *own* dream-

vision. The narrator points out that we often dream about what we have just experienced or pondered (ll.99-105), and behold, as his dream commences, Africanus is standing at his bedside.

Africanus tells the narrator that his dream is a reward for his attentiveness to his book. The narrator then invokes Cytherea, the goddess of love, to help him in his task of setting down the dream (l.116), which seems to indicate that the dream will be about love and that love is what the narrator was concerned with when he was reading. Both Bennett and Reed call attention to interesting ambiguities in this invocation. Cytherea, or Venus, represents both a goddess of love and a planet (Africanus told Scipio to look to the heavens) (Bennett 58, 60). Also, Venus has a dual nature as the goddess of love, implying for different authors depraved lust on one hand, and true, romantic love on the other (Bennett 97-8; Reed 319). All this and more enforces the reading that this poem is a display of the dualisms inherent in what we experience, in this case earthly love.

The narrator's dream becomes even more intriguing as he encounters two contradictory signs over the one gate leading into the park of paradise and the garden of nature (ll.121-41)--one sign tells of an ever-green "blysfyl place" while the other warns that beyond is a sterile, dangerous place that is best avoided. The narrator is naturally hesitant when confronted with the paradoxical nature of love described on the two signs. Before he can make up his mind, Africanus shoves him through the gate, explaining that the message only applies to lovers and not the narrator, since he is a man who has "lost thy tast" for love (l.160). This statement seems to contradict the earlier section where the narrator says that he has never experienced love (l.8). Africanus is not overly helpful, but

he does add that what the narrator sees within will be good food for poetry. At this point (l.169), Africanus disappears from the poem, and his brand of wisdom, as compared to Scipio's dream, seems to have little relevance to the rest of the poem. The narrator is about to experience the park of paradise, Venus's temple of brass, and Natura's garden-- all of which are complex and heavily allusive places. Chaucer borrows heavily from such writers as Guillaume de Lorris, Dante, Boccaccio, and Alanus Insulis in his descriptions of these places and Clemen observes that the literary trends of the day were towards "baffling complexity and intricacy" which "covered the whole, and sometimes constituted the essence of the work itself" (129). However, while Jean de Condé has his narrator explain the intricacies of his poem, Chaucer's narrator is characteristically confused by the wonder, giving only hints as to how we might interpret the scenes.

Leicester's observation about the poem being colored by the narrator's immersion in "the multiplicity, richness and variety of the authoritative traditions, conventions, literary models, lore, etc." relating to the subject of love is useful in interpreting the dream as a whole (18). It is noteworthy that the first half of the narrator's dream, the park, garden, and the temple of brass are the kinds of things a well-read, book-obsessed narrator would dream of. The park of paradise and garden of nature are full of literary references as I have mentioned already. Not only are there allusions to the works of the great literati of the continent, but to medieval encyclopedias and bestiaries as well. In lines 176-182 the narrator lists all of the trees that he sees in the park, each with a tag showing some sort of use or symbol-- "The shetere ew; the asp for shaftes pleyne; / The olyve of pes, and eke the dronke vyne" (ll.180-81). This is a display, not of practical

experience with these trees, as some critics have said (Winny 142), but of his familiarity with scientific tomes and unimaginative poetry. One only has to read some encyclopedia of trees to learn the dry facts that this narrator has. There is a similar catalogue of birds later (ll. 323-364), and I agree with Leicester that these lists "display learning for its own sake" and are projections of the dreamer's subconscious (21-2). The pedantic narrator is in a paradisaal park, yet he does not mention the beauty of the trees but rather their human uses. It is telling that the narrator, after going on with his "encyclopedic bird-lore" drops the listing and says, "But to the poynt" (l.372) (Leicester 18).

Still, the narrator is "glad and wel begoon" to be in this park (l.171), which is a wondrous place full of beautiful fish, eternal spring, and heavenly harmony. Within the park there seems to be a garden of love, peopled by numerous personifications (e.g., Plesaunce and Foolhardynesse), along with Cupid who is preparing his arrows for use. The atmosphere of paradisaal purity becomes more muddied and all of a sudden, in dreamlike fashion, the narrator stands inside a temple of brass lorded over by Priapus himself, with the added attraction of Venus disporting half-naked in a shadowy corner. The narrator enjoys this spectacle at least a little: Venus is half-naked and "The remenaunt was wel kevered to my pay / Ryght with a subtyl coverchef of Valence" (ll.271-2). He next encounters more gods, "savours," and even broken bows of the once chaste followers of Diana. The scene culminates in a most overtly literary way when the narrator discovers a wall painted with scenes of famous lovers such as Paris, Dido, and Tristram, who died for love, or from complications arising therefrom.

Despite the childish delight he took in the half-naked Venus, the narrator has not

enjoyed his experience in the temple of brass; he re-emerges and looks for "solace" (l.297). This is the garden of love again, he says. It has changed, though, or at least he has found a very different precinct of it. Here, Natura reigns on a hill of grass, and "as of lyght the somer sonne shene / Passeth the sterre, right over so mesure / She fayrer was than any creature" (ll.299-301).³ Her kingdom is a world, as James Winny notes, that is much more vital than the temple or park and hence is more satisfying (137, 128). The birds here begin "so huge a noyse" (l.312) that is quite unlike the harmonious birds in the park earlier (ll.190-2). It is Saint Valentine's Day, we learn, and the narrator marvels at the multitude of birds of every kind that have gathered to choose their mates. Even in this more vital natural scene the narrator, typically, goes on to compare this scene to Alanus's *De planctu naturae* (l.316) and then list the birds, with a proverbial epithet for each.

Critics, such as Robert Frank, are quick to point out that the birds are described as "red in tooth and claw" (536), yet, as Clemen says, they are also often related to human vices and virtues (153). Such description may arise from the narrator's secondhand knowledge from books, but it also emphasizes the realism of Natura's realm. Natura herself is beautiful and as Clemen observes, nurturing, human, and full of "intimacy and freshness" (151). She is authoritative, yet mild and benign, encouraging divine natural law by the love and respect she wins from the fowls (131-2). She is "vicaire of the almyghty Lord" (l.379), and she is subsumed under heavenly law, just as the temple of brass in turn seems to be a part of her dominion.

The parliament of the fowls that precedes their pairing off lends this poem its title

and a good portion of its interest. Initially, three tercel eagles give speeches with descending degrees of courtliness within them, all to win Natura's favored, lovely Formel. At the beginning of the third eagle's speech he seems to think that he will not have as much time as the other birds, but his speech lasts from the morning "Tyl downward went the sonne" (l.490). The narrator, probably referring to all three speeches, says "Of al my lyf, syn that I was born / So gentil ple in love or other thyng / Ne herde nevere no man me befor" (ll.484-486). Is this meant to undermine the narrator's credibility? Surely, in *his* reading experience he has encountered more heart-tugging pleas.

Natura seems to recommend the first, Royal Tercel (ll.395-7; 632-7), but in her bountiful love for the Formel she allows her to choose which she will have. The other birds clamor, to the annoyance of the narrator (l.500), while they are forced to sit through the courtly speech-giving of the three tercel eagles who are endeavoring to gain the talon of the beautiful Formel. Natura then calls on the representatives of each type of fowl--the actual bird "parliament"-- to advise the Formel in her decision. The birds soon forget the ostensible reason for their parliament, and the entire affair degenerates into sparring between the birds of ravine and the other birds. On one hand, courtly love is made to look silly and impracticable, while on the other, the lower birds are shown as crass and cynical. The Hawk and Sparrowhawk, who speak for the courtly birds, sink into combativeness and relatively uncouth language, and the Turtledove, who Leicester calls "the most courtly speaker of all," is the only one who maintains her composure, though she does insult the Cuckoo and makes it plain that she disagrees with the Goose (25-6). Chaucer has masterfully "let each point of view throw light on the other" (Clemen 163),

and we are left wondering, much like the now silent narrator, who to favor.

This debate at first seems little to do with the Formel's decision, but it has left her wondering about the nature of love in general, and reluctant to take the plunge into the ambiguous realm of the two-sided Venus, much like the narrator's hesitancy to enter through the enigmatic gate at the dream's beginning.⁴ The Formel asks to defer her decision for a year and this Natura grants, in spite of Natura's own obvious favoring of the Royal Tercel. The narrator concludes the dream with the birds choosing their mates and then singing a roundel of welcome for the warmer weather. "The note, I trowe, imaked was in Fraunce," adds the scholarly narrator (l.677). There is harmony among the birds at the end of the poem, for "all of them have a place in God's multifold scheme of harmonious creation" (Bennett 180). This is one way to look at the roundel, but for the narrator this conclusion, Leicester notes, "looks better than it is" (32).

The harmony of the roundel seems to have had little effect on the narrator as he is awakened by what is harshly described as the "shoutyng" of the birds (McCall 30) and then relates nothing of value to us, except to say that he must continue combing his books for an answer to his problem. He ends the poem this way: "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 nat spare" (ll.697-99).⁵

It is easy for me to see how a sophisticated, courtly audience would enjoy this poem, with its allusions, humor, and the supreme irony of the Formel not choosing any of her suitors on this Valentine's Day. Love in all its dazzling and dangerous array is presented by Chaucer in this lighthearted poem. Reed said that this spirit reflects the

recreational nature of the poem, an atmosphere where decisions did not have to be made (296, 331-2, 339). All of love's mysteries, the celestial and cerebral, the literary, the courtly and common are touched upon here (see Frank 531, 538), but in a way that inspires wonderment and laughter. As the married members of the court probably knew, no experience of earthly love is unmixed in its goodness.

So we have the joy of the vast panoply of love, with the serious underpinnings that Leicester calls attention to. For all our wishes to suspend decision in our lives, there is the recognition that life and nature should proceed, whether we are ready for it or not. The narrator allows himself to become a passive recorder of his experiences and ends up unable to glean much from his dream, just as a first-time reader of the poem is thoroughly confused. And yet this dream is so much the narrator's own mind at play. He is bookish and somewhat elitist in his sympathy for the courtly birds, yet all this literary and mythological tradition doesn't "give us much help in sorting out the actualities of experience" (Reed 323). He does not seem inclined to act until he finds out that "certyn thing," which it is possible can only be learned from actual experience of love as opposed to book-learning. More likely, though, it is the up and down actualities of earthly love and the fact that they are hence unlike the perfection of heavenly love that cripple the narrator for the foreseeable future.

In showing the various wonders of love gleaned from books culminating in a crazy parliament on love, Chaucer has perhaps scared his narrator, just as the Formel who declines to enter the realm of Venus and Cupid for the time being. He has forgotten the "commune profyt" that Africanus and even the Cuckoo refer to (ll.47, 75, 507). Unless

we consider his recording of his dream on paper as his unwitting contribution to the good of the community, the narrator has failed to learn that love is a valuable thing to be experienced (Bennett 189, 193). The narrator enjoys Natura's realm, until the cackling parliament, at least, but does not feel inclined to partake in it. Leicester says that this "thought-marking," or too close pondering of the ways of the world and heavens, leads to inaction (19, 26, 31-2), and hence the ineffectiveness of the parliament and the indecision of the Formel. Humans, as well as birds, the poet implies, must limit themselves and their thoughts to preserve traditional culture (32)-- and the species! The roundel tries to counteract this, but it fails with the narrator (31).

Let us briefly consider the aesthetics of Chaucer's narrator and frame. The introduction seems overlong, and the catalogues, although interesting from a historical standpoint, are not dazzling poetry, except when seen in the light of getting to know the personality of this slightly comical bookish narrator. Chaucer's characterization of the narrator makes all the difference. If we understand the narrator and notice his occasional reactions to the events around him, we will appreciate the poem more. Even when given the opportunity to act in a harmless dream, he does nothing but record and study what he sees, characterizing most every scene with his literarily saturated thought processes. Still, he is a much more emotionally engaging figure than are the narrators of the two pre-Chaucerian Middle English poems we have examined already, and is (thankfully) unable to give heavy-handed moralizations about what he has just seen, as the narrators of the French poems do. The lengthy introduction where we get to know the narrator's thoughts and behavior, the dream that is colored so much by his own mindset and learning, and the

determined, yet mystified post-script allow us to get to know and feel for this narrator more so than any of the previous poems we have looked at. In keeping with the light spirit of the poem, the narrator surveys the vast wonder of love with a mind that we can both relate to and make a little fun of.

v

The semi-comical narrator of "The Cuckoo and the Nightingale" (or "The Book of Cupid") is even more integral to the work than Chaucer's narrator in Parliament of Fowls.

This poem, attributed to Sir John Clanvowe (d.1391), was probably written between 1386 and 1391, a little after Chaucer's poem (Scattergood 14). Clanvowe, like Chaucer, was a man familiar with Richard II's court. In his poem a female Nightingale defends love, this time from the witty onslaught of a male Cuckoo, a bird renowned for its hostility towards love and fidelity. Hence, emotions run high all around. This is one poem, however, in which the narrator is as interesting as the birds, for he is an active partisan on the Nightingale's side. A.C. Spearing adds this observation, contrasting this poem with Chaucer's: "Clanvowe's dreamer is not reluctantly snatched up or shoved into a dream-experience by an authoritative guide, but intervenes most eagerly in the action of his dream" (181). Also, in this poem the narrator and poet seem quite distinct from one another. What the poem means relies a lot on the sympathetically comic handling of the narrator by poet and the ambiguous results of the debate. Clanvowe ultimately puts little stock in arguing an emotional subject such as love, implying rather, a need for tolerance.

This 290-line poem has an elaborate introduction of 111 lines. "The god of loue,

a, benedicite!" is the first, and rhetoric on the powers of love pours forth in the lines which follow. This narrator, unlike Chaucer's, is obviously partisan in a pro-love way. He tells of his current love-sickness and his former ability to love. As Spearing points out, this narrator appears to be an experienced courtier, not a book-learner like Chaucer's narrator (177), and he could represent the middle-aged Clanvowe himself, though more likely he is a fictional persona that Clanvowe sympathetically teases throughout the poem. In any case, the narrator goes out in May, hoping to hear the call of the Nightingale. The third of May is the symbolically ambiguous day the narrator has chosen,⁶ and whichever song he hears first will indicate how he will fare in love this season. He enters a blissful natural bower and witnesses the birds frolicking, happy with the mates they chose on Valentine's Day (l. 80). This narrator, in contrast to the strikingly beautiful surroundings he describes at length, is alone, having no mate, and so is sad.

In lines 86 to 90 the narrator becomes drowsy--"Nought al a-slepe, ne fulli wakyng"--and thinks he hears the Cuckoo sing.⁷ The narrator verbally abuses the Cuckoo and then hears his ally the Nightingale, whom he praises. He then says that he *thinks* he can understand what the birds are saying and proceeds to tell us. Perhaps he is drowsy and only imagining things--is he merely projecting the whole of the following action? It is hard to believe that the narrator would project the birds' calling for a parliament at the end of the poem, especially when the narrator is so biased on one side of the issue.

Whereas the Cuckoo is wry, the Nightingale, with whom the narrator explicitly sides, is a highly emotional bird, who uses abuse in a seemingly desperate attempt to

further her argument. The Nightingale even advocates violence when she says that her cry of "Oci! Oci!" means that they who utter falsehoods about love should be slain (ll.126-30). But after many "fies" and exclamations, the female Nightingale is driven to tears (l.209) and can't "sey oo word more," a sign, according to rules of medieval debate, that she has been defeated (Scattergood 84). She calls upon the "god of love" but receives instead the non-intellectual help of the narrator who casts a stone at the Cuckoo and chases it off. This action is proverbially bad luck. The Cuckoo, as he leaves, calls the narrator a popinjay, implying that he "is a lecherous old fool" (Conlee 262). V. J. Scattergood adds that this insult could also imply "vanity" and "empty conceit," which may also describe this narrator (85). Thus far the narrator has been only a representative of intolerance, bad luck, and physical abuse.

The narrator and the Nightingale then praise and reassure each other, the Nightingale offering refreshment in the form of a daisy which symbolizes constant love (see Conlee 263, Lampe 57, Scattergood 85). The poem finishes with the Nightingale, after securing a parliament to decide the matter, singing a line which Spearing sees as ambiguous--"Terme of life, love hath withhold me," and a line by the narrator saying that he then awoke. Spearing says that the Nightingale's lines could imply that she is love's loyal retainer and provider, or love's prisoner (180). As she sings these last lines she is perched upon a hawthorn bough, which D.E. Lampe points out was a symbol of the crown of thorns and in John Lydgate's works symbolizes constant love (61; see also Scattergood 86). The case is certainly a complex one. We are given, Charles Rutherford points out, multiple endings--a defeated Cuckoo, a call for a parliament to decide the

matter once for all, and a reassurance by the Nightingale and narrator that love will surely triumph (355). Add this to the slight possibility that the narrator is drowsily projecting the whole thing, and we are left with a puzzle of almost Chaucerian proportion.

Spearing points out lines where the poet undermines the narrator and Nightingale's position. He cites, for instance, the fact that the other birds want to call a parliament to decide the matter, not just to believe the "triumphant" Nightingale and narrator. Thus Spearing believes that the poem is making sport of the narrator and the Nightingale and that the narrator is so biased he refuses to learn the tolerance the poem alludes to (180). He sums up his position in these lines:

The aged lover who is the poem's narrator is a violent partisan on behalf of that very God of Love whose cruelty his own life gives evidence; and his inability to tolerate an opposite point of view [like the Nightingale], only proves the truth of the Cuckoo's assertion that 'Love hath no reson but his wille.' (179)

Rutherford has another opinion of the message of "The Book of Cupid." He says that the debate form is a rational one and that love is an abstract, dispassionate subject not suitable for a debate (355). He does not think that Clanvowe, in teasing the narrator, is being *prescriptive* but just *descriptive* (357). In essence, he says, both sides are right and that the narrator is a biased arbiter and presenter of the material. The narrator has taken a "leap of faith" in supporting the Nightingale and has "resolved to endure love's discomforts for the sake of its greater rewards" (358). This is clearly implied in lines 239-40, for instance.

The other, less bellicose and verbose birds in the poem call for a parliament to have the issue decided by the queen, "presumably a wiser, more neutral judge" (Rutherford 358). In the other birds' calling for a parliament, the Nightingale seems satisfied with this arrangement; after all, she does thank the other bird (l.285) and then flies to the hawthorn to begin her campaign song. She seems confident she will win and is eager to muzzle the offensive Cuckoo. If her Queen Anne is happily married to King Richard, and hence ruled by her positive experience of love, then the parliament's outcome would seem a foregone conclusion. However, if this parliament turned out to be anything like the one in Chaucer's poem (and Clanvowe could be making a hilarious direct allusion to it), we know the result could well be a donnybrook. Rutherford's judgment that Clanvowe is highlighting the "ironic possibilities of using a form based upon logic to treat a subject as illogical as love" (358) might be attributing a little more intent to Clanvowe than seems likely, but is more persuasive than Spearing's conclusion.

We must remember that the narrator is only mildly teased and, as Rutherford says, he means well and is "eager to learn and serve" the reader (354). He may be a little unlucky and hasty, but I hardly think that by this teasing Clanvowe wants us to feel sympathy for the Cuckoo. In fact, all three combatants are very self-important and bitter towards one another. There still is some room for an aspect of Spearing's argument, however. Spearing views the poem as an argument for tolerance, and Rutherford's calling the debate form irrational also implies that varying views on irrational subjects should be tolerated. We are probably being advised that to take extreme positions on such a wide-ranging, irrational issue as love is a foolhardy thing to do.

Clearly, in Clanvowe's poem the narrator and poet are differentiated, and the poet mocks the narrator who is overenthusiastic and one-sided in his defense of love; but surely there is a romantic side to most of us makes us wish to dispose of the problems love can bring just as the narrator tries to dispose of the cuckoo. As Scattergood says, this narrator is an example of a "man caught by the irresistible but ambivalent power of love" (13). Whether his idealism and optimism are running a bit high or he is trying to curry favor in a desperate attempt to end his love drought, the narrator certainly makes this poem unique.

That the poem shows the fallibilities of arguing an irrational subject like love, with the logical implication that tolerance should be exercised seems to be an accurate interpretation of this poem, especially in light of the fact that Clanvowe was well-acquainted with Chaucer's works and his bird debate poem. The reference to Queen Anne (ll.284-5), assuming it is one, almost assuredly shows that the poem was intended for the royal court (Scattergood 9). Rutherford and others point out that some lines are similar to those in some of Chaucer's poems. Clanvowe could be directly referring to The Parliament of Fowls when he mentions that the birds have paired on Valentine's Day as well as their call for a parliament at the poem's end. Chaucer was not the sole influence on Clanvowe, for as Scattergood points out, in Eustace Deschamp's "En ce douls temps" a narrator goes out to greet Love but hears a cuckoo and has to be comforted by Pity (11-12); and the calmer birds who arrange for the parliament may be reminiscent of the Wren in The Owl and the Nightingale. In any case, I see this poem as a minor masterpiece, influenced by Chaucer and the other French poets, but not a slavish imitation of them.

We are given a beautiful description of the outdoors and some love legends, a humorous, witty, abusive debate, a comically active narrator, and a multifold conclusion that is not a true conclusion at all, but nevertheless implies an argument for tolerance in a world of all-too violent conflict.

vi

Though there is not a clear linear chronological development of the role of the narrator in the bird debate poems, *per se*, there is active modulation of the form. In each poem we have treated so far, the narrator has had a different kind of role. "The Clerk and the Nightingale" is a work of the fifteenth century and represents the logical conclusion of the ability of the narrator to play an important part in a debate poem. Going one step further than Clanvowe and his amusingly biased and active narrator, in this poem the narrator, after a short eight-line introduction, engages the bird in debate himself. This poem is also a novelty in that the poet and the reader (to a lesser extent) apparently do not sympathize in the least with the narrator as he does in the other poems of the genre. Instead, the narrator is comically undermined by his poet, to a degree not seen in the more sympathetic treatments by Chaucer and Clanvowe.

Although the poem is not a true bird debate, it has much in common with the others, as it depicts a sentimental Clerk debating an unusually cynical Nightingale regarding matters of love. Unlike any of the other poems, it is two males who are debating (Conlee 266).⁸ At first, the Clerk enjoys the singing of this Nightingale which he hears as he "lay on slepyng." As Conlee mentions, this line could indicate that the Clerk

is in a half-awake, dreamlike state similar to Clanvowe's narrator, but more likely that the Clerk is gradually awakened by the bird and that as the debate ensues he is fully awake (267). It is merely a quick, inexact way of getting from the obviously cursory introduction to the debate itself. "I shall tell the euery delle," says the Clerk, and he goes on to do just this, to report his debate with the embittered Nightingale. He is merely recording events here. There are no dialogue tags in the poem and the framing fiction is not taken up again at the end.

As the debate begins, we soon notice many parallels with "The Thrush and the Nightingale" and with Clanvowe's poem as well. The feisty Nightingale is given more lines and stronger arguments. The Clerk can barely go beyond insulting his opponent ("Nighyngale, thou gabbist me!") and making vague and possibly inadequate claims about the virtues of women ("Wymmen be fayre and hende") (I ll.65-6). He is constantly made to look like the weaker debater. Like the woman-hating Thrush, the Nightingale uses examples to back up his arguments (I ll.47, 57-8, 79, 95). When the Clerk tries to use the biblical example of Mary that won over the Thrush, he is immediately and effectively countered by his not-so-easily gulled opponent (I ll.45-64). The Clerk, later, practically admits ignorance, asking the bird to teach him "the trew and the good" (II l.38). But after hearing the Nightingale's lines crudely prefiguring John Donne's "Goe and catch a falling star," he is reduced to physical and mental anguish (II ll.55-62) and proceeds to threaten the Nightingale with physical violence (as in Clanvowe). This is indeed a strange depiction of a supposedly learned man. It is surely ironic that the Nightingale calls the Clerk "not to lore sete" (I l.38).

Perhaps the most interesting thing about this work is how the poet undermines the narrator Clerk. Only after being threatened with violence does the Nightingale give lip-service to the Clerk's opinions about women (II l.67-74), and even then he addresses the clerk sarcastically--"Nay, clerk, for thi curtesy." And once he is at a safe distance from the menacing Clerk, the Nightingale gives his opponent repeated warnings and sarcastically wishes him luck. As he departs, the Nightingale bids the Clerk again, "I rede thou to my wordys tak hede" (II l.86), and so the poem is finished seemingly with the bird as victor. Surprisingly, the Clerk, who began the poem as narrator, makes no comment at the end of the dispute. In "The Thrush and the Nightingale" the silence of the narrator is easy to understand--the birds have ended up in agreement and the narrator concurs, but here the narrator engages in debate and apparently gives up, ending up in a miserable state and allowing the bird to have the last word! The poet is seemingly having fun at the expense of the romantic clerk; what his motives were in doing this it is hard to say.

Of course, there is the possibility that the two fragments do not constitute one poem, hence the tacit ending of the debate may not correspond to the narrative beginning of the first fragment. Another possibility is that, especially since it is so perfunctory, the narrative beginning frame was never really meant to imply that the Clerk was going to be a narrator at all. As Davidoff observes, having a framing introduction is so conventional that it is like beginning a fairy tale with "Once upon a time..." (54). She claims that a medieval audience would "demand" such conventional beginnings to poems (25), in which case this short-eight line preface to the debate may not really endow the Clerk-

debater with any real narrative capacity apart from going through the motions of the necessary frame. I, however, like to think of the poem as a sort of reaction to all the debates where the pro-love bird carries the day-- a sort of burlesque come-uppance as it were.

There is certainly nothing new or interesting in the frame itself. The narrator says he enjoys the Nightingale's song, but he soon finds himself at odds with the singer. This is a nice comical touch, as are many of the ways the poet makes the Clerk look like he is being outsmarted throughout the debate. The poem is not as sophisticated in this regard as are Chaucer's or Clanvowe's poems. It is rather an odd hybrid of these two and the relatively spare "Thrush and the Nightingale."

vii

"The Merle and the Nightingale" is a debate between two birds who are both in favor of love, but they differ as to which type of love is best--earthly or divine. This skillful, if not spectacular, poem is attributed to William Dunbar (c.1456-c.1513) and was probably written in the late fifteenth-century. In the end the birds unite in singing harmoniously of the superiority of divine love. The narrator in this poem does not dominate the narrative (as he nearly did in the last two poems discussed) but plays a significant and interesting framing role, occupying about thirty of the poem's 120 lines.

In the first line the narrator mentions "Aurora," the Roman deity of dawn, and tells of a "merry Merle" that sings in a "comfortable," "sueit and delectable" way. The Merle is under "orient bemis" and sits upon a laurel branch, more signs of a pagan,

earthly poetry. These are quite sensual words compared to those used by the narrator for the Nightingale. The sky is "hevinly" in the Nightingale's case. Her feathers are "angell" and her words "trew," as opposed to the Merle's more sensuously described ones.

Between the two birds there is "a river bricht / Of balmy liquour, cristallyne of hew" (ll.9-10), reminiscent of the river separating the earth-bound narrator and his angelic daughter in Pearl. Dunbar, by using such "overtly allegorical" language in his narration (Davidoff 167) is offering us something new here, and so long as we assume that the narrator is a devout Christian, Davidoff's statement is true: "it is clear where virtue resides; the outcome of the 'debate' is a foregone conclusion" (Davidoff 168). But this is not a safe assumption to make, for the descriptions serve to delineate the birds' positions, not the narrator's. Nor do they hint at the resolution of the dispute, since both of the birds' songs are described in terms of loveliness. The narrator is essentially *neutral* at the start of this poem, and we await to see what unfolds between these two radiant birds.

The two birds' songs are described so similarly in lines 17-28 that it is hard to assume that the poet intends his narrator to favor either bird from the outset. In line 25 the Nightingale's song is described as sweet, as was the Merle's in line 7, and as the birds debate, the narrator says nothing apart from providing dialogue tags. Then, even more inexplicably than in "The Thrush and the Nightingale," the Merle is suddenly converted to the Nightingale's side, and they join each other in praising God in "vocis lowd and cleir" (l. 105). The narrator provides an ending frame for his little tale, saying that the birds' love for God and their harmonious singing have "maid my thochtis grene" (l. 115). Twenty-four hours of the day, the narrator will keep this in mind. He will devoutly

reflect upon their harmonious, thoroughly otherworldly sentiment--"Man, lufe the Lord most deir, / That the and all this world maid of nocht" (ll. 107-8). The more enlightened, if not perfect, narrator will try to follow the birds' advice; the poem ends with an exact reiteration of the Nightingale's refrain from throughout the poem, "All lufe is lost bot upone God allone."

The Merle refers to "Luve" with an emphatic capital "L" (l.8 *passim*), meaning Cupid is his god, and the Merle also mentions "Flora" and "Natur" (l. 21, 22 *passim*). The Nightingale, however, uses only the Christian "God." Clearly, two antitheses are being set up here, and through the course of the debate the Merle and the narrator (and the reader, Dunbar hopes) learn that the Nightingale's philosophy is the correct one. The narrator was *neutral* at the start of the poem and depended on the debate itself for resolution of the question of which love is "better." By describing both birds in such lovely terms, the narrator's neutrality trickles down to the reader. At the poem's end, the narrator helps affirm for the audience the conclusion the birds have reached. This is an instance where, as in Chaucer, "the framing fiction's being closed is crucial to the meaning of the poem" (Davidoff 168).

The creative touches in Dunbar's frame are welcome. The birds' actual debate and its inexplicably neat resolution recall the more simplistic "The Thrush and the Nightingale," but the opening frame's pagan/Christian contrasts are fresh and effective.

middle fifteenth century. As Conlee discusses, the format of a parliament poem allows the poet to give voice to "a colorful array" of bird speakers in this "free-for-all" debate (Conlee xxxii), which appears to be even more random and disorganized than Chaucer's appeared to be. Sandison says that this poem, though possibly inspired by Chaucer's courtly bird parliament, owes little to it in structure. The debating procedure is not strict, there is no decision rendered, no dream-vision, no allegory, and no direct borrowing from Latin, Italian, and French sources (60).

The subject of the debate, once again, is love, and we hear from many species of birds who are given brief space to express themselves. The birds can be put into three categories-- *fine amour* love sufferers, uncouth love cynics, and one espouser of divine love. The first two types are reminiscent of Chaucer's birds while the third takes its cue perhaps from the Nightingale in "The Thrush and the Nightingale." In parliamentary poems "characterization generally suffers" (Conlee xxxiii) and the birds do not seem influence or convince each other. Hence, there is no real conclusion as far as the birds are concerned. We must look to the narrator and order of the bird speakers for hints at what to conclude-- if we are meant to conclude anything beyond the fact that love is a much disputed topic. We find that the narrator is possibly projecting his melancholy and romantic thoughts onto the birds, as he delights in one bird and then decries another cynical bird. Finally, the poem's conclusion makes mention of the love of God, concluding the debate on a brand new level. Hence, the narrator and reader both learn through the course of the poem, similar to Dunbar's poem.

The poem is quite a sad, lyrical one, with a definite ironic quality, and this irony is

reflected in the opening lines of the poem. The narrator begins, "In May when euery herte is lyght," "Flourys frosschely sprede & sprynge" and the sun is "in the Bole so cler schynynge." But the narrator's heart is not at all light, for he is full of "doulour" and out wandering in search of relief for his love-sickness. The bird songs then begin to ring out, and we can imagine a beautiful scene with a narrator listening to nearly random bird calls, hoping for some advice. Though not as directly involved as Clanvowe's Cuckoo-stoning narrator, this narrator is almost masochistically on the side of languishing in the name of love. The narrator is, on the other hand, an active commentator, and he speaks much more than the birds, whom he describes and introduces. The irony of the poem springs from the contrast of his introductions and the words of the various fowls.

The Turtle dove speaks first, mentioning being pensive, which is what the narrator and reader are about to become as the other birds begin to call. The Nightingale and Mavis are next, both expressing rather dimly hopeful views. The narrator implicitly agrees with them, describing their songs in terms of delight. He calls the Nightingale's cry "angell" and says that the Mavis's "sote" song "taughte trewly, I you ensure" (ll.20, 25, 31). It is not surprising that the narrator would agree with these birds, considering his lovelorn state. There is a kind of melancholic bittersweetness to their words. The discordant Jay, who does not care about love, "chatters" and is "unpleasaunt," according to the narrator (ll.34, 36). The Robin and Wren reply to the Jay (for the narrator, it would seem) and tell of their support for love and lovers. The Pheasant and Lark speak next, and the narrator, realizing the sadness of what they say, identifies with them. The Lark's song is sung "drerilyche" and is called "compleynynge be dispeyr" (l.59, 60). It is not

complaint in the vein of the Jay's, so the narrator does not object.

The oddest of all the bird descriptions is that of the "joly gold fynch, frosch & gay, / With sunny federys bryghte & schene" (ll.65-6). For all the Goldfinch's supposed joy, its song is a lengthy one about languishing over disappointment in love. Rather than being merely a sort of clumsy juxtaposition of accurate and natural description and the narrator's point of view, the narrator seems to be projecting his melancholy on these bright, innocent birds. Is long love-lamentation an appropriate "frosch & gay" pursuit for early summer? No, it is not, but perhaps the poet is referring to the beauty of love-longing, or that under the most joyous of appearances lies sadness. Whether the poet is emotionally projecting and what the poet is trying to imply regarding these ironic juxtapositions is impossible to determine for certain, there are only hints for my aforementioned suppositions. They *definitely are* exciting possibilities which make the poem rich and thought-provoking at each reading.

The poem continues and the Cuckoo pipes up next, directly responding to the Goldfinch. He is called "uncurteys" and "most unkynde" (l.73) as he tells the Goldfinch that it is foolish to lament an easily replaced lost lover. The Cuckoo is not a courtly bird and is uncouth and "can no french," in contrast to all the other birds who have sung thus far (l.77). The Popinjay disagrees with the Cuckoo. With these last birds, the debate seems to be intensifying, as they are directly responding to each other, the Popinjay even using the vocative. Another "negative" bird, the "frosty feldefare," speaks next (l.89). He is described (just as in Chaucer) with what is probably a pun on his plumage and his cool attitude towards love. He disagrees with pursuing unrequited love and cannot fully

encapsulate his idea in French. He can only say "adew, adew," (l.96) perhaps reflecting what the narrator thinks are the Fieldfare's half-baked ideas. To my common, non-courtly, sense the Fieldfare's attitude seems to be a relatively healthy one and not so cynical or amoral as the Cuckoo's or Starling's.

The final exchange between those for love and against it follows. The Titmouse speaks eloquently, beautifully about hope and patience. The narrator offers no comment on the titmouse and precious little on the uncouth starling, who is said to "sterter & stare" (l.105). Starting and staring may be non-courtly things to do, but it also the words' alliteration that makes the poet put them there. The Starling is the most unrefined of all, saying, in English, that he loves all women alike (l.112).

The Starling's speech offers a direct contrast to the final speech, made by the Throstle-cock. The narrator half summarizes this bird's speech (mentioning only the lack of "gentillesse" of the Starling, not the Throstle's advice, which is love for God) and then allows the bird to finish. The Throstle speaks of courtly "gentillesse" as a preface to his advice (though it *is* the narrator who actually speaks to us for the bird), but the throstle says,

"Wherefore I rede yow alle to dresse

Of on to synge with herte entyre,

That wele not fayle in non distresse:

En dieu maffie sans departer." Amen. (117-120)

This implies that all the birds (and the narrator) have missed the mark. They should not forget the most gentle songs and sentiments of all--devotions to God. Nearly all the birds

(and the narrator) are either languishing for love's sake or are cynical about love. Both sides are wrong, according to the Throstle.

The quoted words of the Throstle are the first and only obviously religious sentiments expressed by the birds or the narrator. The fact that the narrator speaks for the Throstle, basically saying that the Starling is immoral, and then allows the Throstle himself to add the religious dimension to the poem, is a nice touch by the poet, serving to isolate the religious aspect of the bird's speech. The narrator, however, may be the last "speaker" of the poem, for the word "Amen" appears at the poem's conclusion, outside of the quoted speech by the Throstle. Has the narrator changed his mind, as the Merle and Thrush did after listening to the spiritual nightingales? If this is the narrator's "Amen" rather than the scribe who copied the manuscript, then it surely implies this.

The narrator's "Amen," which is not set off from the lines of the poem, but the true last word of the poem, shows that in the end he agrees with the Throstle, as should we the readers. Underneath even the most beautiful plaint lies an irreligious thought, the poet says. As in "The Merle and the Nightingale," the narrator and audience both learn over the course of the poem, but here what we learn is something of a surprise. Rather than a decision between two antitheses, this poem takes the argument to a whole other level in an attempt to render both sides' arguments ineffective. The debate originates between birds for and against earthly love, but when the Throstle speaks the poem is suddenly raised to another, unexpected level, something like "The Thrush and the Nightingale" and its mention of Mary. Here, though, it is more convincing as the narrator emotionally casts about while listening to the disputants until he is finally reminded that

whatever one's experiences or opinions of love between humans, there is a greater love.

The form and tone in "A Parliament of Birds" are something new and are quite pleasing aesthetically. The bird calls seem to ring out almost at random, reflecting the fact that there is, as Reed says, "no easy solution to love's dilemmas" (199). We have a poem akin to Chaucer's catalogue of birds and bird parliament combined, all in 120 lines. Add to this a very expressive and lovelorn narrator and we get something different from any of the other poems. Yet, as Reed points out, the message about earthly love the pre-Throstle debate directs us towards could be nearly the same as Chaucer's. In "A Parliament of Birds,"

humans do not live in a world of perfect intellectual clarity and volitional control; and consequently they explore with moving fidelity the difficulty of pursuing dimly perceived and occasionally conflicting ideals in a realm of distracting phenomena. (204)

Here we have another instance of Reed's "experiential realism" in these debate poems, with a helping of supernatural faith added at the end. Though the religious ending tries to clear away the earlier debate, the reader can not help but think upon the skillful way this debate is rendered by the poet and his narrator. The narrator takes us by the hand and guides us through the wood reflecting on his melancholy state as he hears the birds call out, some in stark contrast to their jovial appearance. The result is--for this writer--the most emotionally engaging poem of this study. It is compact, yet not as oversimplified as Dunbar's poem or "The Thrush and the Nightingale and is not so elusive and given to

light comedy as Chaucer's. Only Clanvowe's poem, which sympathetically teases the earnest narrator, approaches its bittersweet beauty.

The framing of the tale by a narrator--one important aspect of the *chanson d'aventure*--is not a static convention, but a flexible device that varies from poem to poem. Not only does his role vary from poem to poem, but it turns out that the narrator, rather than the debating birds, is the true vehicle that the poet uses to steer the reader's conclusions about the debate and what lesson we should take from each poem. There are, of course exceptions, such as "The Thrush and the Nightingale," where the narrator may just as well be absent. He contributes little to the poem, but he does tacitly enforce the conclusion the two debating birds reach for themselves. In The Owl and the Nightingale the narrator does contribute to the poem's complexity, but he is an odd commentator who adds to the interpretive confusion almost as if another (rather unintelligent) bird were present at the debate. In addition to amusement we are left with the feeling that much of the argument in the world is a vain waste of time. In the poems which follow, the narrator plays a more explicit role in the reader's reaction to the work, though never as a straightforward moralist of the French variety.

Chaucer's narrator is a complex figure whose matter-of-factness makes him a good reporter, but his reliance on books and unwillingness to dabble in love's ambiguities make him a figure of mild fun, as Chaucer shows us a great panoply of attitudes toward Love. His dreamscape reflects his learning and we both laugh at the narrator and share in his confusion and wonder at the world of human love. In Clanvowe's Chaucerian "Cuckoo

and the Nightingale," the narrator provides an elaborate introduction to the poem and then takes part in the birds' section of the poem, casting stones and chatting with the Nightingale, who he so obviously and passionately favors. The poet and narrator are implicitly differentiated, and this narrator complicates the plot, adds to the general fun of the poem, and is made to look somewhat extreme in his virulent defense of one side in the great debate between the two sides of love's coin. We sympathize with this narrator's human passion, but recognize the example the poet is making of him, emphasizing the need for tolerance in this world of conflict.

The narrator/clerk in "The Clerk and the Nightingale" breaks through the boundaries of the genre by directly debating a bird, thus conflating the roles of narrator and debater. In the spirit of Chaucer and *Clanvowe*, this narrator is also satirized in this reaction to the heavily moralistic French poems and "Thrush and the Nightingale" of the genre. In "The Merle and the Nightingale" the narrator plays a smaller role, but is nonetheless important in interpreting the poem. The narrator learns, along with the Merle and the audience, and he makes a rather touching statement at the poem's close that he will try his best to follow the birds' advice. In "A Parliament of Birds" the narrator is ever-present, reporting and reflecting upon the birds' speeches. There is some of the Chaucerian humor in the debate as well as evidence of the multifold nature of love. The narrator's melancholy pervades the poem, but even he learns something new by the end of the poem. Clearly, there was much room for the poet's creativity in the manipulation of this bird-debate frame and the narrator contributes greatly to the emotional and aesthetic quality of the works. Most importantly, no matter the size of his role, the narrator plays a

large part in approving or challenging the results of the bird debates.

On the whole, these poems are amusing as well as pleasantly instructive. The framing narrator allows the audience to feel that they are eavesdropping right along with him. Having a human narrator offering not only observation but commentary gives these poems an air of authority and realism to match their fancy. As I discussed earlier (pages 3-4), there are many reasons why medieval poets chose to use birds as their debate protagonists rather than people, however much the debates concerned human problems and conditions. The device of the narrator serves as an introduction, but more importantly as a filter to the poems-- we view the debate through the human eyes, reading what the narrator reports and having our reading colored by the narrator's verbal comments and physical reactions. Whatever serious or comic interpretation we gather from the debates is a product of the poet's depiction of his narrator, whether it be Chaucer's ever-searching but mystified narrator, Clanvowe's earnest but misguided lover, or "The Parliament of Birds" narrator's approving "Amen" at the conclusion of the work. It is the human element, not the avian, that ultimately draws our intellects and emotions to the majority of the Middle English bird debates.

Notes

1. I refer to the birds with feminine pronouns because, as Reed notes, "the poem's language preserves grammatical gender, and 'ule' and 'nihtegale' are feminine nouns, the birds are consistently referred to with feminine pronouns" (220 n.). There is, he adds, no evidence that the poet meant to refer to male birds, so he uses feminine pronouns. Hume warns us that because this femininity is quite possibly a purely linguistic matter, "it is unsafe to base an interpretation on [this] characteristic" (65 n.4).

2. I have only read these two poems in B.A. Windeatt's prose translations, so *much* of the quality of the original has been lost I am sure, but I can still make a few observations about the general structure and theme of the poems.

3. As Bennett says it, "The brightness of Venus pales with the coming of the sun" (106).

4. "It is no wonder that the formel cannot make up her mind," writes James Dean. "She has her being in the poet's dream, and the poet has difficulty with decisiveness himself" (23).

5. Winny notes that the narrator does not immediately set about writing down his dream, unlike the narrator of Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* (140, 139). He follows Africanus's advice that the dream is worthy of poetic recording, and yet he does not have any idea how to interpret it.

6. See Conlee 254, Lampe 60, and Scattergood 82.

7. Spearing argues, somewhat dubiously based upon the fifth-century writings of Macrobius on dreams, that such a half-awake state does not lead to dreams with "symbolic possibilities" (*oracula* or *somnia*) but offers only meaningless *phantasma* (9-10, 176). Constance Hieatt thinks it likely that Chaucer (and, hence, Clanvowe possibly) did not put much stock in these ideas and so is not referring to them in his poetry (33). While Chaucer and Clanvowe borrow from other writers, they are both adept at creatively modifying their material.

8. Conlee's edition is based upon two fragments of what is probably the same poem. Line references are prefaced by roman numerals to refer to which fragment they come from.

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