

Chapter V

Conclusion

The Parliament of Fowls is a successful occasional poem. It was composed for the marriage of King Richard II and Anne of Bohemia in 1382. The story takes place on Saint Valentine's Day in early summer. The venue of the parliament is in an enclosed garden, which is filled with many symbolic plants and animals. There are several Roman gods and goddesses in and outside the brass temple of the garden. Goddess Nature holds a mate-choosing party for a multitude of birds at the forum of a flowery hill. The four-classed birds have a keen debate upon courtly and earthly love.

Although the poem is allegorical, it contains many realistic aspects of human life and nature. After more than 620 years, we can still find the mediaeval people's attitude toward nature. It is not a long poem, but it reveals a lot of information for us to interpret and endow new meanings to the text. It helps us understand the relationship between mankind and the world in the late Middle Ages. The love theme of the poem is seen through the three perspectives of nature.

The first perspective of nature is time and space in the dream vision. They are the two dimensions of the wonderland in Chaucer's dream vision narrative. However, the time and space in this poem are not totally realistic, but free and flexible. The narrator mentions frequently the measurement of time, such as day, night, month, season, year, and age. He senses the existence of time in his dream, but we can find out the leap of time in the text.

Time is related to the theme of love. Early summer is the mating and breeding

season of nature. May used to be the favourite month and often appeared in mediaeval literature. Like the light of the day, May also represents life and rebirth. It is a month of love and joy. In addition, time becomes a standard to judge lovers' loyalty. In the three male eagles' courting statements, the duration of a lover's service is the criterion of being the best lover.

The mate-choosing event happens in a walled garden. The garden is not only a beautiful place filled with plants and animals but also an ideal version of nature. The place is designed according to human preference of nature. The garden is cultivated to satisfy human beings' needs and desires. Nature in this dream vision is not realistic, but artificial. The garden is arranged to contain almost every aspect of nature – rocks, plants, and animals. It is a crafted model of the Paradise in the secular world. The garden fulfills man's expectation to return to nature. An enclosed garden becomes a motif of rare beauty and pure love. We can feel the happiness and comfort in the garden.

The second perspective of nature is flora and fauna in the garden. Since Chaucer creates a dreamland with time and space, he puts many plants and animals in the garden according to their kinds. There are flower, herb, and tree for plants, and insect, fish, beast, and bird for animals. The plants and animals are not merely decorations of the garden. Each of them has symbolic meanings, and the garden becomes allegorical. Particularly, Chaucer presents the plants and animals in two detailed categories: thirteen kinds of trees and thirty-six species of birds. The specific descriptions of trees and birds reflect the knowledge of nature in the late Middle Ages. Chaucer takes advantage of different kinds of sources. The descriptions of plants and

animals become conventional techniques in western literature.

Although the flower is a symbol of beauty for its showy colours and fragrant odours, it is the generative organ of a plant. The flower has to be attractive in order to absorb the attention of the insects. The insects come to visit the flowers, and they help the plants to propagate by spreading anther. Therefore, the flower can be regarded as the symbol of fertility. In order to honour Priapus, people set upon his head with garlands of fresh flowers of various colours. Because the flowers are the sexual organs of plants to produce seeds, and are adequate gifts to Priapus.

Rabbits, different deer, squirrels, and other small gentle furry beasts are associated with erotic and procreative activities. They are related to the theme of mating in the poem. The regularity and abundance of the forest, in a pre-Romantic culture, symbolize perfection. The rabbit has strong procreative ability and propagates rapidly. It used to be taken as a symbol of fertility. The male and female deer were associated with the metaphor of lovers in Song of Solomon. In the Middle Ages, the hunting of the deer, particularly the hart (herte), was traditionally linked to erotic pursuit.

Several birds are associated with love and fertility in the bird list. The dove is conventionally associated with Venus. The association of the sparrow with Venus and libido is very common in classical literature. The sparrows are believed to yoke Venus's chariot in the sky. The nightingale is regarded as the herald of spring, and its beautiful songs stimulate lovers to fall in love at night. The turtle-dove is a bird of mildness with tender cooing sound. It advocates the fidelity of love on behalf of the seed-eating birds in the debate. In folklore, the wild cock cuckolds the domestic one,

because the pheasant is more beautiful than the rooster. The popinjay is full of delicacy because it is thought to be wanton. The drake is aggressive to its kind. It attacks the female duck at the end of the mating season. It is believed that the male stork would kill an unfaithful mate. The birds are anthropomorphized with human behaviours.

The third perspective of nature is the nature deities. There are seven deities who are directly mentioned or indirectly alluded in the poem. All of them have the attributes of love and sex, which are the two elements of fertility. They are all from Roman mythology: Cupid (god of love), Priapus (god of phallus and garden), Venus (goddess of garden, beauty, and love), Bacchus (god of viticulture and wine), Ceres (goddess of agriculture, marriage, and childbirth), Diana (goddess of virginity), and Flora (goddess of flower, spring, and youth). Among them, Cupid prepares his arrows with his daughter Will outside the temple. Priapus, Venus, Bacchus, and Ceres are ardently worshiped in the brass temple. The other two goddesses are not directly seen in the text. Diana, though absent, is scorned by the broken bows hung on the walls of the temple. The maidens regret to serve the goddess and want to live their own life. Floralia is the Roman root of the celebration of Saint Valentine's Day. Early summer was the period for young people to dance and choose their mates.

Although those gods and goddesses are different characters, they interrelate to each other. They are relevant to love and sex. They are the primal drives of nature. Chaucer juxtaposes them in the background of his dream vision in order to demonstrate the secular aspect of love discussed in the birds' parliament. Love becomes a moral standard of mankind and even an attribute to God's divinity.

Nevertheless, original love in nature is associated with mating, sexual behaviour, and propagation.

The whole thesis can be concluded with “nature of love” and “love of nature.” On one hand, the issue of the parliament of birds is about several questions – who is the best lover, what is love, and who can understand love. The representatives of the four classes of birds proclaim their opinions about the meaning of love. This corresponds to the purpose of the composition of the poem – to celebrate the royal marriage of Richard II. On the other hand, the background of the prothalamion is set in nature. The plants, animals, and deities are the reflection of human cognition of nature. The narrator is aware of the existence of nature, and appreciates its beauty. Therefore, the poem is an embodiment of “nature of love” and “love of nature.”