

## Chaucer, The Parliament of Fowls

(ca. 1380s)

Middle English text: <http://www.librarius.com/parliamentfs.htm>

Modern English translation:

<http://ummutility.umm.maine.edu/necastro/chaucer/translation/pf/pf.html>

5 The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne,  
Th'assay so hard, so sharp the conqueringe,  
The dredful joye alwey that slit so yerne,  
Al this mene I by love, that my felynge  
Astonyeth with his wonderful werkynge  
So sore y-wis, that whan I on him thinke,  
Nat woot I wel wher that I flete or sinke.

10 For al be that I knowe nat love in dede,  
Ne wot how that he quyeth folk hir hyre,  
Yet happeth me ful ofte in bokes rede  
Of his miracles, and his cruel yre;  
Ther rede I wel he wol be lord and syre,  
I dar not seyn, his strokes been so sore,  
But God save swich a lord! I can no more.

15 Of usage, what for luste what for lore,  
On bokes rede I ofte, as I yow tolde.  
But wherfor that I speke al this? Nat yore  
Agon, hit happed me for to beholde  
Upon a boke, was write with lettres olde;  
20 And ther-upon, a certeyn thing to lerne,  
The longe day ful faste I radde and yerne.

25 For out of olde felde, as men seith,  
Cometh al this newe corn fro yeer to yeer;  
And out of olde bokes, in good feith,  
Cometh al this newe science that men lere.  
But now to purpos as of this matere --  
To rede forth hit gan me so delyte,  
That al the day me thoughte but a lyte.

The life so brief, the art so long in the learning, the attempt so hard, the conquest so sharp, the fearful joy that ever slips away so quickly--by all this I mean love, which so sorely astounds my feeling with its wondrous operation, that when I think upon it I scarce know whether I wake or sleep.

For albeit I know not love myself; nor how he pays people their wage, yet I have very often chanced to read in books of his miracles and his cruel anger there, surely, I read he will ever be lord and sovereign, and his strokes will be so heavy I dare say nothing but, "God save such a lord!" I can say no more.

Somewhat for pleasure and somewhat for learning I am in the habit of reading books, as I have told you. But why speak I of all this? Not long ago I chanced to look at a book, written in antique letters, and there I read very diligently and eagerly through the long day, to learn a certain thing.

For, as men say, out of old fields comes all this new corn from year to year; and, in good faith, out of old books comes all this new knowledge that men learn. But now to my theme in this matter: it so delighted me to read on, that the whole day seemed to me rather short.

30 This book of which I make of mencion,  
Entitled was al thus, as I shal telle,  
'Tullius of the Dreame of Scipioun.'  
Chapitres seven it hadde, of hevene and helle,  
And erthe, and soules that therinne dwelle,  
Of whiche, as shortly as I can it trete,  
35 Of his sentence I wol you seyn the grete.

First telleth it, whan Scipion was come  
In Affrike, how he mette Massinisse,  
That him for joye in armes hath inome.  
Than telleth it hir speche and al the blisse  
40 That was bitwix hem, til the day gan misse;  
And how his auncestre, Affrican so dere,  
Gan in his slepe that night to him appere.

Than telleth it that, fro a sterry place,  
How Affrican hath him Cartage shewed,  
45 And warned him before of al his grace,  
And seyde him, what man, lered other lewed,  
That loveth commune profit, wel y-thewed,  
He shal unto a blisful place wende,  
Ther as joye is that last withouten ende.

50 Than asked he, if folk that heer be dede  
Have lyf and dwelling in another place;  
And African seyde, 'Ye, withoute drede,'  
And that our present worldes lyves space  
Nis but a maner deth, what wey we trace,  
55 And rightful folk shal go, after they dye,  
To hevene; and shewed him the galaxye.

Than shewed he him the litel erthe, that heer is,  
At regard of the hevenes quantite;  
And after shewed he him the nyne speres,  
60 And after that the melodye herde he  
That cometh of thilke speres thryes thre,  
That welle is of musyk and melodye  
In this world heer, and cause of armonye.

This book of which I speak was entitled Tully on the Dreame of Scipio [i.e., Macrobius's 5<sup>th</sup> c. commentary on Cicero's *The Dreame of Scipio*, an ethical treatise that included much natural philosophy and astronomy]. It had seven chapters, on heaven and hell and earth, and the souls that live in those places; about which I will tell you the substance of Tully's opinion, as briefly as I can.

First the book tells how, when Scipio had come to Africa, he met Masinissa, who clasped him in his arms for joy. Then it tells their conversation and all the joy that was between them until the day began to end; and then how Scipio's beloved ancestor Africanus appeared to him that night in his sleep.

Then it tells how Africanus showed him Carthage from a starry place, and disclosed to him all his good fortune to come, and said to him that any man, learned or unlettered, who loves the common profit and is virtuous shall go to a blessed place where is joy without end.

Then Scipio asked whether people that die here have life and dwelling elsewhere; and Africanus said, "Yes, without doubt," and added that our space of life in the present world, whatever way we follow, is just a kind of death, and righteous people, after they die, shall go to heaven.

And he showed him the Milky Way, and the earth here, so little in comparison with the hugeness of the heavens; and after that he showed him the nine spheres. And then he heard the melody that proceeds from those nine spheres, which is the fount of music and melody in this world, and the cause of harmony.

65 And ful of torment and of harde grace,  
That he ne shulde him in the world delyte.  
Than tolde he him, in certeyn yeres space,  
That every sterre shulde come into his place  
Ther it was first; and al shulde out of minde  
70 That in this worlde is don of al mankinde.

Than prayde him Scipioun to telle him al  
The way to come un-to that hevene blisse;  
And he seyde, `Know thy-self first immortal,  
And loke ay besily thou werke and wisse  
75 To commune profit, and thou shalt nat misse  
To comen swiftly to that place dere,  
That ful of blisse is and of soules clere.

But brekers of the lawe, soth to seyne,  
And lecherous folk, after that they be dede,  
80 Shul alwey whirle aboute th'erthe in peyne,  
Til many a world be passed, out of drede,  
And than, for-yeven alle hir wikked dede,  
Than shul they come unto that blisful place,  
To which to comen god thee sende his grace!" --

85 The day gan failen, and the derke night,  
That reveth bestes from her besinesse,  
Biraft me my book for lakke of light,  
And to my bedde I gan me for to dresse,  
Fulfil of thought and besy hevynesse;  
90 For bothe I hadde thing which that I nolde,  
And eek I ne hadde that thing that I wolde.

But fynally my spirit, at the laste,  
For-wery of my labour al the day,  
Took rest, that made me to slepe faste,  
95 And in my slepe I mette, as I lay,  
How Affrican, right in the selfe array  
That Scipioun him saw before that tyde,  
Was comen and stood right at my bedes syde.

Then Africanus instructed him not to take delight in this world, since earth is so little and so full of torment and ill favor. Then he told him how in a certain term of years every star should come into its own place, where it first was; and all that has been done by all mankind in this world shall pass out of memory.

Then he asked Africanus to tell him fully the way to come into that heavenly happiness; and he said, "First know yourself to be immortal; and always see that you labor diligently and teach for the common profit, and you shall not fail to come speedily to that dear place that is full of joy and of bright souls.

But breakers of the law, in truth, and lecherous folk, after they die, shall ever be whirled about the earth in torment, until many an age be passed; and then, all their wicked deeds forgiven, they shall come to that blessed region, to which may God send you His grace to come."

The day began to end, and dark night, which withdraws beasts from their activity, bereft me of my book for the lack of light; and I set forth to my bed, full of brooding and anxious heaviness. For I both had that which I wished not and what I wished that I had not.

But at last, wearied with all the day's labor, my spirit took rest and heavily slept; and as I lay in my sleep, I dreamed how Africanus, in the very same guise in which Scipio saw him that time before, had come and stood at the very side of my bed.

100 The wery hunter, slepinge in his bed,  
 To wode ayein his minde goth anoon;  
 The juge dremeth how his plees ben sped;  
 The carter dremeth how his cartes goon;  
 The riche, of gold; the knight fight with his foon;  
 The seke met he drinketh of the tonne;  
 105 The lover met he hath his lady wonne.

Can I nat seyn if that the cause were  
 For I had red of Affrican befor,  
 That made me to mete that he stood there;  
 But thus seyde he, `thou hast thee so wel born  
 110 In loking of myn olde book to-torn,  
 Of which Macrobie roghte nat a lyte,  
 That somdel of thy labour wolde I quyte!' --

Cytherea! Thou blisful lady swete,  
 That with thy fyr-brand dauntest whom thee lest,  
 115 And madest me this sweven for to mete,  
 Be thou my help in this, for thou mayst best;  
 As wisly as I saw thee north-north-west,  
 When I began my sweven for to wryte,  
 So yif me might to ryme and endite!

120 This forseid Affrican me hente anon,  
 And forth with him unto a gate broghte  
 Right of a parke, walled of grene stoon;  
 And over the gate, with lettres large y-wroghte,  
 Ther weren vers y-writen, as me thoghte,  
 125 On eyther halfe, of ful gret difference,  
 Of which I shal yow sey the pleyn sentence.

`Thorgh me men goon in-to that blisful place  
 Of hertes hele and dedly woundes cure;  
 Thorgh me men goon unto the welle of Grace,  
 130 Ther grene and lusty May shal ever endure;  
 This is the way to al good aventure;  
 Be glad, thou reder, and thy sorwe of-caste,  
 Al open am I. Passe in, and sped thee faste!"

When the weary hunter sleeps, quickly his mind returns to the wood; the judge dreams how his cases fare, and the carter how his carts go; the rich dream of gold, the knight fights his foes; the sick man dreams he drinks of the wine cask, the lover that he has his lady.

I cannot say whether my reading of Africanus was the cause that I dreamed that he stood there; but thus he spoke, "You have done so well to look upon my old tattered book, of which Macrobius thought not a little, that I would requite you somewhat for your labor."

Cytherea [i.e. Venus], you sweet, blessed lady, who with your fire-brand subdues whomsoever you wish, and sends me this dream, be my helper in this, for you are best able! As surely as I saw you in the north-northwest when I began to write my dream, so surely do you give me power to rhyme it and compose it!

This aforesaid Africanus took me from there and brought me out with him to a gate of a park walled with mossy stone; and over the gate on either side, carved in large letters, were verses of very diverse senses, of which I shall tell you the full meaning:

"Through me men go into that blessed place  
 Where hearts find health and deadly wounds find cure,  
 Through me men go unto the fount of Grace,  
 Where green and lusty May shall ever endure.  
 I lead men to blithe peace and joy secure.  
 Reader, be glad; throw off your sorrows past.  
 Open am I; press in and make haste fast."

135 Thorgh me men goon,' than spak that other syde,  
 `Unto the mortal strokes of the spere,  
 Of which Disdayn and Daunger is the gyde,  
 Ther tre shal never fruyt ne leues bere.  
 This streem yow ledeth to the sorwful were,  
 Ther as the fish in prison is al drye;  
 140 Th'eschewing is only the remedye.'

Thise vers of gold and blak y-writen were,  
 Of whiche I gan a stounde to beholde,  
 For with that oon encresed ay my fere,  
 And with that other gan myn herte bolde;  
 145 That oon me hette, that other did me colde,  
 No wit had I, for errour, for to chese  
 To entre or flee, or me to save or lese.

Right as, bitwixen adamauntes two  
 Of even might, a pece of iren y-set,  
 150 That hath no might to meve to ne fro --  
 For what that on may hale, that other let --  
 Ferde I; that niste whether me was bet,  
 To entre or leve, til Affrican my gyde  
 Me hente, and shoof in at the gates wyde,

155 And seyde, `hit stondeth writen in thy face,  
 Thyn errour, though thou telle it not to me;  
 But dred the nat to come in-to this place,  
 For this wryting is nothyng ment by thee,  
 Ne by noon, but he Loves servaunt be;  
 160 For thou of love hast lost thy tast, I gesse,  
 As seeke man hath of swete and bitternesse.

But natheles, al-though that thou be dulle,  
 Yit that thou canst not do, yit mayst thou see;  
 For many a man that may not stonde a pulle,  
 165 Yit lyketh him at the wrastling for to be,  
 And demeth yit wher he do bet or he;  
 And if thou haddest cunning for t'endite,  
 I shal thee shewen mater of to wryte.'

On the other side it said:  
 "Through me men go where all mischance betides,  
 Where is the mortal striking of the spear,  
 To which Disdain and Coldness are the guides,  
 Where trees no fruit or leaf shall ever bear.  
 This stream shall lead you to the sorrowful weir  
 Where fish in baleful prison lie all dry.  
 To shun it is the only remedy."

These inscriptions were written, the one in gold, the other in black, and I beheld them for a long while, for at the one my heart grew hardy, and the other ever increased my fear; the first warmed me, the other chilled me. For fear of error my wit could not make its choice, to enter or to flee, to lose myself or save myself.

Just as a piece of iron set between two load-stones of equal force has no power to move one way or the other--for as much as one draws the other hinders. So it fared with me, who knew not which would be better, to enter or not, until Africanus my guide caught and pushed me in at the wide gates,

saying, "Your doubt stands written on your face, though you tell it not to me. But fear not to come in, for this writing is not meant for you or for any, unless he would be Love's servant. For in love, I believe, you have lost your sense of taste, even as a sick man loses his taste of sweet and bitter.

Nevertheless, dull though you may be, you can still look upon that which you cannot do; for many a man who cannot complete a bout is nevertheless pleased to be at a wrestling match, and judges whether one or another does better. And if you have skill to set it down, I will show you something to write about."

170 With that my hand in his he took anon,  
 Of which I comfort caughte, and went in faste;  
 But, lord, so I was glad and wel begoon!  
 For overal, wher that I myn eyen caste,  
 Were trees clad with leves that ay shal laste,  
 Ech in his kinde, of colour fresh and grene  
 175 As emeraude, that joye was to sene.

The bilder ook, and eek the hardy asshe;  
 The piler elm, the cofre unto careyne;  
 The boxtree piper; holm to whippes lasshe;  
 180 The sayling firr; the cipres, deth to pleyne;  
 The sheter ew, the asp for shaftes pleyne;  
 The olyve of pees, and eek the drunken vyne,  
 The victor palm, the laurer to devyne.

A gardyn saw I, ful of blosmy bowes,  
 Upon a river, in a grene mede,  
 185 Ther as swetnesse evermore y-now is,  
 With floures whyte, blewe, yelow, and rede;  
 And colde welle-stremes, no-thing dede,  
 That swommen ful of smale fisshes lighte,  
 With finnes rede and scales silver-brighte.

190 On every bough the briddes herde I singe,  
 With voys of aungel in hir armonye,  
 Som besyed hem hir briddes forth to bringe;  
 The litel conyes to hir pley gonne hye.  
 And further al aboute I gan espye  
 195 The dredful roo, the buk, the hert and hinde,  
 Squerels, and bestes smale of gentil kinde.

Of instruments of strenges in acord  
 Herde I so pleye a ravissing swetnesse,  
 That God, that maker is of al and lord,  
 200 Ne herde never better, as I gesse;  
 Therwith a wind, unnethe it might be lesse,  
 Made in the leves grene a noise softe  
 Acordaunt to the foules songe on-lofte.

With that he took my hand in his, from which I took comfort and quickly  
 went in. But Lord, how glad and at ease I was! For everywhere I cast my  
 eyes were trees clad, each according to its kind, with everlasting leaves in  
 fresh color and green as emerald, a joy to behold:

the builder oak, eke the hardy ash, the elm the pillar and the coffin for  
 corpses, the boxwood for horns, the holly for whip-handles, the fir to bear  
 sails, the cypress to mourn death, the yew the bowman, the aspen for  
 smooth shafts, the olive of peace, the drunken vine, the victor palm, and the  
 laurel for divination.

By a river in a green meadow, where there is at all points so much  
 sweetness, I saw a garden, full of blossomy boughs, with white, blue,  
 yellow and red flowers; and cold fountain-streams, not at all dead, full of  
 small shining fish with red fins and silver-bright scales.

On every bough I heard the birds sing with the voice of angels in their  
 melody. Some busied themselves to lead forth their young. The little  
 bunnies hastened to play. Further on I noticed all about the timid roe, the  
 buck, harts and hinds and squirrels and small beasts of gentle nature.

I heard stringed instruments playing harmonies of such ravishing sweetness  
 that God, Maker and Lord of all, never heard better, I believe. At the same  
 time a wind, scarce could it have been gentler, made in the green leaves a  
 soft noise which accorded with the song of the birds above.

205 The air of that place so attempre was  
That never was grevaunce of hooete ne cold;  
Ther wex eek every holsum spyce and gras,  
Ne no man may ther wexe seeke ne old;  
Yet was ther joye more a thousand fold  
Then man can telle; ne never wolde it nighte,  
210 But ay cleer day to any mannes sighte.

Under a tree, besyde a welle, I say  
Cupyd our lord his arwes forge and fyle;  
And at his fete his bowe al redy lay,  
And wel his doghter tempred al this whyle  
215 The hedes in the welle, and with hir wyle  
She couched hem after as they shulde serve,  
Some for to slee, and some to wounde and kerve.

Tho was I war of Plesaunce anon-right,  
And of Aray, and Lust, and Curtesye,  
220 And of the Craft that can and hath the might  
To doon by force a wight to do folye --  
Disfigurat was she, I nil not lye;  
And by him-self, under an oke, I gesse,  
Saw I Delyt, that stood with Gentilnesse.

225 I saw Beautee, withouten any atyr,  
And Youthe, ful of game and jolyte,  
Fool-hardinesse, Flattery, and Desyr,  
Messagerye, and Mede, and other three --  
Hir names shul noght here be told for me --  
230 And upon pilers grete of jasper longe  
I saw a temple of bras y-founded stronge.

Aboute the temple daunceden alway  
Wommen y-nowe, of whiche some ther were  
Faure of hem-self, and somme of hem were gay;  
235 In kirtels, al disshevele, wente they there --  
That was hir office alway, yeer by yere --  
And on the temple, of doves whyte and faure  
Saw I sittinge many a hunderede paire.

The air of that place was so mild that never was there discomfort for heat or cold. Every wholesome spice and herb grew there, and no person could age or sicken. There was a thousand times more joy than man can tell. And it would never be night there, but ever bright day in every man's eye.

I saw Cupid our lord forging and filing his arrows under a tree beside a spring, and his bow lay ready at his feet. And meanwhile his daughter well tempered the arrow-heads in the spring, and by her cunning she piled them after as they should serve, some to slay, some to wound and pierce.

Just then I was aware of Pleasure and of Fair Array and Courtesy and Joy and of Deception who has wit and power to cause a being to do folly--she was disguised, I deny it not. And under an oak, I believe, I saw Delight, standing apart with Gentle Breeding.

I saw Beauty without any raiment; and Youth, full of sportiveness and jollity, Foolhardiness, Flattery, Desire, Message-sending and Bribery; and three others--their names shall not be told by me. And upon great high pillars of jasper I saw a temple of brass strongly stand.

About the temple many women were dancing ceaselessly, of whom some were beautiful themselves and some gay in dress; only in their kirtles they went, with hair unbound--that was forever their business, year by year. And on the temple I saw many hundred pairs of doves sitting, white and beautiful.

240 Before the temple-dore ful sobrelly  
Dame Pees sat, with a curteyn in hir hond:  
And hir besyde, wonder discretly,  
Dame Pacience sitting ther I fond  
With face pale, upon an hille of sond;  
And aldernext, within and eek with-oute,  
245 Behest and Art, and of hir folke a route.

Within the temple, of syghes hoot as fyr  
I herde a swogh that gan aboute renne;  
Which syghes were engendred with desyr,  
That maden every auter for to brenne  
250 Of newe flaume; and wel aspyed I thenne  
That al the cause of sorwes that they drye  
Com of the bitter goddesse Jalousye.

The god Priapus saw I, as I wente,  
Within the temple, in sovereyn place stonde,  
255 In swich array as whan the asse him shente  
With crye by night, and with his sceptre in honde;  
Ful besily men gonne assaye and fonde  
Upon his hede to sette, of sondry hewe,  
Garlondes ful of fresshe floures newe.

260 And in a privee corner, in disporte,  
Fond I Venus and hir porter Richesse,  
That was ful noble and hauteyn of hir porte;  
Derk was that place, but afterward lightnesse  
I saw a lyte, unnethe it might be lesse,  
265 And on a bed of golde she lay to reste,  
Til that the hoot sonne gan to weste.

Hir gilte heres with a golden threde  
Y-bounden were, untressed as she lay,  
And naked fro the breste unto the hede  
270 Men might hir see; and, soothly for to say,  
The remenant wel kevered to my pay  
Right with a subtil coverchief of Valence,  
Ther was no thikker cloth of no defence.

Before the temple-door sat Lady Peace full gravely, holding back the  
curtain, and beside her Lady Patience, with pale face and wondrous  
discretion, sitting upon a mound of sand. Next to her were Promise and  
Cunning and a crowd of their followers within the temple and without.

Inside I heard a gust of sighs blowing about, hot as fire, engendered of  
longing, which caused every altar to blaze ever anew. And well I saw then  
that all the cause of sorrows that lovers endure is through the bitter goddess  
Jealousy.

As I walked about within the temple I saw the god Priapus standing in  
sovereign station, his scepter in hand, and in such attire as when the ass  
confounded him to confusion with its outcry by night. People were busily  
setting upon his head garlands full of fresh, new flowers of various colors.

In a private corner I found Venus, who was noble and stately in her bearing,  
sporting with her porter Riches. The place was dark, but in time I saw a  
little light--it could scarcely have been less. Venus reposed upon a golden  
bed until the hot sun should seek the west.

Her golden hair was bound with a golden thread, but all untressed as she  
lay. And one could see her naked from the breast to the head; the remnant,  
in truth, was well covered to my pleasure with a filmy kerchief of Valence;  
there was no thicker cloth that could also be transparent.



275 The place yaf a thousand savours swote,  
 And Bachus, god of wyn, sat hir besyde,  
 And Ceres next, that doth of hunger bote;  
 And, as I seide, amiddes lay Cipryde,  
 To whom on knees two yonge folkes cryde  
 To ben hir help; but thus I leet hir lye,  
 280 And ferther in the temple I gan espye

That, in dispyte of Diane the chaste,  
 Ful many a bowe y-broke heng on the wal  
 Of maydens, suche as gonne hir tymes waste  
 In hir servyse; and peynted over al  
 285 Of many a story, of which I touche shal  
 A fewe, as of Calixte and Athalaunte,  
 And many a mayde, of which the name I wante;

Semyramus, Candace, and Ercules,  
 Biblis, Dido, Thisbe, and Piramus,  
 290 Tristram, Isoude, Paris, and Achilles,  
 Eleyne, Cleopatre, and Troilus,  
 Silla, and eek the moder of Romulus --  
 Alle these were peynted on that other syde,  
 And al hir love, and in what plyte they dyde.

295 Whan I was come ayen unto the place  
 That I of spak, that was so swote and grene,  
 Forth welk I tho, my-selven to solace.  
 Tho was I war wher that ther sat a quene  
 That, as of light the somer-sonne shene  
 300 Passeth the sterre, right so over mesure  
 She fairer was than any creature.

And in a launde, upon an hille of floures,  
 Was set this noble goddesse Nature;  
 Of braunches were hir halles and hir boures,  
 305 Y-wrought after hir craft and hir mesure;  
 Ne ther nas foul that cometh of engendrure,  
 That they ne were prest in hir presence,  
 To take hir doom and yeve hir audience.

The place gave forth a thousand sweet odors. Bacchus, god of wine, sat beside her, and next was Ceres, who saves all from hunger, and, as I said, the Cyprian woman lay in the midst; on their knees two young people were crying to her to be their helper. But thus I left her lying, and further in the temple I saw how,

in scorn of Diana the chaste, there hung on the wall many a broken bow of such maidens as had first wasted their time in her service. And everywhere was painted many stories, of which I shall touch on a few, such as Callisto and Atalanta and many maidens whose name I do not know.

There was also Semiramis, Candace, Hercules, Byblis, Dido, Thisbe and Pyramus, Tristram and Isolt, Paris, Achilles, Helen, Cleopatra, Troilus, and Scylla, and the mother of Romulus as well--all were portrayed on the other wall, and their love and by what plight they died.

When I had returned to the sweet and green garden that I spoke of, I walked forth to comfort myself. Then I noticed how there sat a queen who was exceeding in fairness over every other creature, as the brilliant summer sun passes the stars in brightness.

This noble goddess Nature was set upon a flowery hill in a verdant glade. All her halls and bowers were wrought of branches according to the art and measure of Nature. And there was not any bird that is created through procreation that was not ready in her presence to hear her and receive her judgment.

310 For this was on Seynt Valentynes day,  
Whan every foul cometh ther to chese his make,  
Of every kinde, that men thynke may;  
And that so huge a noyse gan they make,  
That erthe and see, and tree, and every lake  
So ful was, that unnethe was ther space  
315 For me to stonde, so ful was al the place.

And right as Aleyn, in the Pleynt of Kynde,  
Devyseth Nature of aray and face,  
In swich array men mighten hir ther finde.  
This noble emperesse, ful of grace,  
320 Bad every foul to take his owne place,  
As they were wont alwey fro yeer to yere,  
Seynt Valentynes day, to stonden there.

That is to sey, the foules of ravyne  
Were hyst set; and than the foules smale,  
325 That eten as hem nature wolde enclyne,  
As worm or thing of whiche I telle no tale;  
And water-foul sat loweste in the dale;  
But foul that liveth by seed sat on the grene,  
And that so fele, that wonder was to sene.

330 There mighte men the royal egle finde,  
That with his sharpe look perceth the sonne;  
And other egles of a lower kinde,  
Of which that clerkes wel devysen conne.  
Ther was the tyraunt with his fethres donne  
335 And greye, I mene the goshawk, that doth pyne  
To briddes for his outrageous ravyne.

The gentil faucoun, that with his feet distreyneth  
The kinges hond; the hardy sperhawk eke,  
The quayles foo; the merlion that payneth  
340 Him-self ful ofte, the larke for to seke;  
Ther was the douve, with hir eyen meke;  
The jalous swan, ayens his deeth that singeth;  
The oule eek, that of deeth the bode bringeth;

For this was Saint Valentine's day, when every bird of every kind that men can imagine comes to this place to choose his mate. And they made an exceedingly great noise; and earth and sea and the trees and all the lakes were so full that there was scarcely room for me to stand, so full was the entire place.

And just as Alan [of Lille], in *The Complaint of Nature*, describes Nature in her features and attire, so might men find her in reality. This noble empress, full of grace, bade every bird take his station, as they were accustomed to stand always on Saint Valentine's day from year to year.

That is to say, the birds of prey were set highest, and then the little birds who eat, as nature inclines them, worms or other things of which I speak not; but water-fowls sat the lowest in the dale; and birds that live on seed sat upon the grass, so many that it was a marvel to see.

There one could find the royal eagle, that pierces the sun with his sharp glance; and other eagles of lower race, of which clerks can tell. There was that tyrant with dun gray feathers, I mean the goshawk, that harasses other birds with his fierce ravening.

There was the noble falcon, that with his feet grasps the king's hand; also the bold sparrow-hawk, foe of quails; the merlin that often greedily pursues the lark. The dove was there, with her meek eyes; the jealous swan, that sings at his death; and the owl also, that forebodes death;

345 The crane the geaunt, with his trompes sounē;  
 The thief, the chogh; and eek the jangling pye;  
 The scorning jay; the eles foo, heroune;  
 The false lapwing, ful of trecherye;  
 The stare, that the counseyl can biwrey;  
 The tame ruddok; and the coward kyte;  
 350 The cok, that orloge is of thorpes lyte;

The sparrow, Venus sone; the nightingale,  
 That clepeth forth the fresshe leves newe;  
 The swallow, morderer of the flyes smale  
 That maken hony of floures fresshe of hewe;  
 355 The wedded turtel, with hir herte trewe;  
 The pecok, with his aungels fethres brighte;  
 The fesaunt, scorner of the cok by nighte;

The waker goos; the cuckow ever unkinde;  
 The popiniay, ful of delicasye;  
 360 The drake, stroyer of his owne kinde;  
 The stork, the wreker of avoutrye;  
 The hote cormeraunt of glotonye;  
 The raven wys, the crow with vois of care;  
 The throstel olde; the frosty feldefare.

365 What shulde I seyn? Of foules every kinde  
 That in this world han fethres and stature,  
 Men mighten in that place assembled finde  
 Before the noble goddesse Nature,  
 And ech of hem did his besy cure  
 370 Benignely to chese or for to take,  
 By hir acord, his formel or his make.

But to the poynt -- Nature held on hir honde  
 A formel egle, of shap the gentileste  
 That ever she among hir werkes fonde,  
 375 The moste benigne and the goodlieste;  
 In hir was every vertu at his reste,  
 So ferforth, that Nature hir-self had blisse  
 To loke on hir, and ofte hir bek to kisse.

the giant crane, with his trumpet voice; thieving chough; the prating  
 magpie; the scornful jay; the heron, foe to eels; the false lapwing, full of  
 trickery; the starling, that can betray secrets; the tame redbreast; the coward  
 kite; the cock, timekeeper of little thorps;

the sparrow, son of Venus; the nightingale, which calls forth the fresh new  
 leaves; the swallow, murderer of the little bees which make honey from the  
 fresh-hued flowers; the wedded turtle-dove, with her faithful heart; the  
 peacock, with his shining angel-feathers; the pheasant, that scorns the cock  
 by night;

the vigilant goose; the cuckoo, ever unnatural; the popinjay, full of  
 wantonness; the drake, destroyer of his own kind; the stork, that avenges  
 adultery; the greedy, gluttonous cormorant; the wise raven and the crow,  
 with voice of ill-boding; the ancient thrush and the wintry fieldfare.

What more shall I say? One might find assembled in that place before the  
 noble goddess Nature birds of every sort in this world that have feathers and  
 stature. And each by her consent worked diligently to choose or take  
 graciously his lady or his mate.

But to the point: Nature held on her hand a formel eagle, the noblest in  
 shape that she ever found among her works, the gentlest and goodliest; in  
 her every noble trait so had its seat that Nature herself rejoiced to look upon  
 her and to kiss her beak many times.

380 Nature, the vicaire of the almighty Lord,  
 That hoot, cold, hevvy, light, and moist and dreye  
 Hath knit by even noumbre of acord,  
 In esy vois began to speke and seye,  
 `Foules, tak hede of my sentence, I preye,  
 And, for your ese, in furthering of your nede,  
 385 As faste as I may speke, I wol me spede.

Ye knowe wel how, Seynt Valentynes day,  
 By my statut and through my governaunce,  
 Ye come for to chese -- and flee your way --  
 Your makes, as I prik yow with plesaunce.  
 390 But natheles, my rightful ordenaunce  
 May I not lete, for al this world to winne,  
 That he that most is worthy shal beginne.

The tercel egle, as that ye knowen wel,  
 The foul royal above yow in degree,  
 395 The wyse and worthy, secree, trewe as stel,  
 The which I formed have, as ye may see,  
 In every part as it best lyketh me,  
 It nedeth noght his shap yow to devyse,  
 He shal first chese and speken in his gyse.

400 And after him, by order shul ye chese,  
 After your kinde, everich as yow lyketh,  
 And, as your hap is, shul ye winne or lese;  
 But which of yow that love most entryketh,  
 God sende him hir that sorest for him syketh.'  
 405 And therwith-al the tercel gan she calle,  
 And seyde, `my sone, the choys is to thee falle.

But natheles, in this condicioun  
 Mot be the choys of everich that is here,  
 That she agree to his eleccioun,  
 410 What-so he be that shulde be hir fere;  
 This is our usage alwey, fro yeer to yere;  
 And who so may at this time have his grace,  
 In blisful tyme he com in-to this place.'

Nature, vicar of the Almighty Lord, who has knit in harmony hot, cold, heavy, light, moist, and dry in exact proportions, began to speak in a gentle voice: "Birds, take heed of what I say; and for your welfare and to further your needs I will hasten as fast as I can speak.

"You well know how on Saint Valentine's day, by my statute and through my ordinance, you come to choose your mates, as I prick you with sweet pain, and then fly on your way. But I may not, to win this entire world, depart from my just order, that he who is most worthy shall begin.

"The tercel eagle, the royal bird above you in degree, as you well know, the wise and worthy one, trusty, true as steel, which you may see I have formed in every part as pleased me best--there is no need to describe his shape to you--he shall choose first and speak as he will.

"And after him you shall choose in order, according to your nature, each as pleases you; and, as your chance is, you shall lose or win. But whichever of you love ensnares most, to him may God send her who sighs for him most sorely." And at this she called the tercel and said, "My son, the choice is fallen to you.

"Nevertheless under this condition must be the choice of each one here, that his chosen mate will agree to his choice, whatsoever he be who would have her. From year to year this is always our custom. And whoever at this time can win grace has come here in blissful time!"

415 With hed enclyned and with ful humble chere  
 This royal tercel spak and taried nought:  
 `Unto my sovereign lady, and noght my fere,  
 I chese, and chese with wille and herte and thought,  
 The formel on your hond so wel y-wrought,  
 Whos I am al and ever wol hir serve,  
 420 Do what hir list, to do me live or sterve.

Beseching hir of mercy and of grace,  
 As she that is my lady sovereyne;  
 Or let me dye present in this place.  
 For certes, long may I not live in peyne;  
 425 For in myn herte is corven every veyne;  
 Having reward only to my trouthe,  
 My dere herte, have on my wo som routhe.

And if that I to hir be founde untrewre,  
 Disobeysaunt, or wilful negligent,  
 430 Avauntour, or in proces love a newe,  
 I pray to you this be my jugement,  
 That with these foules I be al to-rent,  
 That ilke day that ever she me finde  
 To hir untrewre, or in my gilte unkinde.

435 And sin that noon loveth hir so wel as I,  
 Al be she never of love me behette,  
 Than oghte she be myn thourgh hir mercy,  
 For other bond can I noon on hir knette.  
 For never, for no wo, ne shal I lette  
 440 To serven hir, how fer so that she wende;  
 Sey what yow list, my tale is at an ende.'

Right as the fresshe, rede rose newe  
 Ayen the somer-sonne coloured is,  
 Right so for shame al wexen gan the hewe  
 445 Of this formel, whan she herde al this;  
 She neyther answerde `Wel', ne seyde amis,  
 So sore abashed was she, til that Nature  
 Seyde, `doghter, drede yow noght, I yow assure.'

The royal tercel, with bowed head and humble appearance, delayed not and spoke: "As my sovereign lady, not as my spouse, I choose--and choose with will and heart and mind--the formel of so noble shape upon your hand. I am hers wholly and will serve her always. Let her do as she wishes, to let me live or die;

I beseech her for mercy and grace, as my sovereign lady, or else let me die here presently. For surely I cannot live long in torment, for in my heart every vein is cut. Having regard only to my faithfulness, dear heart, have some pity upon my woe.

And if I am found untrue to her, disobedient or willfully negligent, a boaster, or in time love elsewhere, I pray you this will be my doom: that I will be torn to pieces by these birds, upon that day when she should ever know me untrue to her or in my guilt unkind.

And since no other loves her as well as I, though she never promised me love, she ought to be mine by her mercy; for I can fasten no other bond on her. Never for any woe shall I cease to serve her, however far she may roam. Say what you will, my words are done."

Even as the fresh red rose newly blown blushes in the summer sun, so grew the color of this woman when she heard all this; she answered no word good or bad, so sorely was she abashed; until Nature said, "Daughter, fear not, be of good courage."

Another tercel egle spak anoon  
450 Of lower kinde, and seyde, `that shal nat be;  
I love hir bet than ye do, by Seynt John,  
Or atte leste I love hir as wel as ye;  
And lenger have served hir, in my degree,  
And if she shulde have loved for long loving,  
455 To me allone had been the guerdoninge.

I dar eek seye, if she me finde fals,  
Unkinde, Iangler, or rebel in any wyse,  
Or Ialous, do me hongen by the hals!  
And but I bere me in hir servyse  
460 As wel as that my wit can me suffyse,  
From poynt to poynt, hir honour for to save,  
Take she my lyf, and al the good I have.'

The thridde tercel egle answerde tho,  
`Now, sirs, ye seen the litel leyser here;  
465 For every foul cryeth out to been a-go  
Forth with his make, or with his lady dere;  
And eek Nature hir-self ne wol nought here,  
For taryng here, noght half that I wolde seye;  
And but I speke, I mot for sorwe deye.

Of long servyse avaunte I me nothing,  
But as possible is me to dye to-day  
For wo, as he that hath ben languisshing  
Thise twenty winter, and wel happen may  
A man may serven bet and more to pay  
475 In half a yere, al-though it were no more,  
Than som man doth that hath served ful yore.

I ne sey not this by me, for I ne can  
Do no servyse that may my lady plese;  
But I dar seyn, I am hir trewest man  
480 As to my dome, and feynest wolde hir ese;  
At shorte wordes, til that deeth me sese,  
I wol ben hires, whether I wake or winke,  
And trewe in al that herte may bethinke.'

Then spoke another tercel of a lower order: "That shall not be. I love her better than you, by Saint John, or at least I love her as well, and have served her longer, according to my station. If she should love for long being to me alone should be the reward;

and I also dare to say, if she should find me false, unkind, a prater, or a rebel in any way, or jealous, let me be hanged by the neck. And unless I bear myself in her service as well as my wit allows me, to protect her honor in every point, let her take my life and all the wealth I have."

Then a third tercel eagle said, "Now, sirs, you see how little time we have here, for every bird clamors to be off with his mate or lady dear, and Nature herself as well, because of the delay, will not hear half of what I would speak. Yet unless I speak I must die of sorrow.

I boast not at all of long service; but it is as likely that I shall die of woe today as he who has been languishing these twenty winters. And it may well happen that a man may serve better in half a year, even if it were no longer, than another man who has served many years.

I do not say this about myself, for I can do no service to my lady's pleasure; but I dare say that I am her truest man, I believe, and would be most glad to please her. In short, until death may seize me I will be hers, whether I wake or sleep, and true in all that heart can think."

485 Of al my lyf, syn that day I was born,  
 So gentil plee in love or other thing  
 Ne herde never no man me befor,  
 Who-so that hadde leyser and cunning  
 For to reherse hir chere and hir speking;  
 And from the morwe gan this speche laste  
 490 Til downward drow the sonne wonder faste.

The noyse of foules for to ben delivered  
 So loude rong, `have doon and let us wende!  
 That wel wende I the wode had al to-shivered.  
 `Come of!' they cryde, `allas! ye wil us shende!  
 495 Whan shal your cursed pleding have an ende?  
 How shulde a juge eyther party leve,  
 For yee or nay, with-outen any preve?'

The goos, the cokkow, and the doke also  
 So cryden, `kek, kek!' `kukkow!' `quek, quek!' hye,  
 500 That thorgh myn eres the noyse wente tho.  
 The goos seyde, `al this nis not worth a flye!  
 But I can shape hereof a remedye,  
 And I wol sey my verdict faire and swythe  
 For water-foul, who-so be wrooth or blythe.'

505 `And I for worm-foul,' seyde the fool kukkow,  
 `For I wol, of myn owne auctorite,  
 For comune spede, take the charge now,  
 For to delivere us is gret charite.'  
 `Ye may abyde a whyle yet, parde!'  
 510 Seide the turtel, `if hit be your wille  
 A wight may speke, him were as good be stille.

I am a seed-foul, oon the unworthieste,  
 That wot I wel, and litel of kunninge;  
 But bet is that a wightes tonge reste  
 515 Than entermeten him of such doinge  
 Of which he neyther rede can nor singe.  
 And who-so doth, ful foule himself acloyeth,  
 For office uncommitted ofte anoyeth.'

In all my life since the day I was born never have I heard any man so noble make a plea in love or any other thing--even if a man had time and wit to rehearse their expression and their words. And this discourse lasted from the morning until the sun drew downward so rapidly.

The clamor released by the birds rung so loud--"Make an end of this and let us go!"--that I well thought the forest would be splintered. They cried, "Make haste! Alas, you will ruin us! When shall your cursed pleading come to an end? How should a judge believe either side for yea or nay, without any proof?"

The goose, cuckoo and duck so loudly cried, "Kek, kek!", "Cuckoo!", "Quack, quack!" that the noise reverberated in my ears. The goose said, "All this is not worth a fly! But from this I can devise a remedy, and I will speak my verdict fair and soon, on behalf of the waterfowl. Let who will smile or frown."

"And I for the worm-eating fowl," said the foolish cuckoo; "of my own authority, for the common welfare, I will take the responsibility now, for it would be great charity to release us." "By God, you may wait a while yet," said the turtle-dove. "If you are he to choose who shall speak, it would be as well for him to be silent.

I am among the birds that eat seed, one of the most unworthy, and of little wit--that I know well. But a creature's tongue would be better quiet than meddling with such doings about which he knows neither rhyme nor reason. And whosoever does so, overburdens himself in foul fashion, for often one not entrusted to a duty commits offence."

520 Nature, which that alway had an ere  
 To murmur of the lewednes behinde,  
 With facound voys seide, 'hold your tonges there!  
 And I shal sone, I hope, a counseyl finde  
 You to delivere, and fro this noyse unbinde;  
 I juge, of every folk men shal oon calle  
 525 To seyn the verdit for you foules alle.'

Assented were to this conclusioun  
 The briddes alle; and foules of ravyne  
 Han chosen first, by pleyne eleccioun,  
 The tercelet of the faucon, to diffyne  
 530 Al hir sentence, and as him list, termyne;  
 And to Nature him gonnen to presente,  
 And she accepteth him with glad entente.

The tercelet seide than in this manere:  
 'Ful hard were it to preve hit by resoun  
 535 Who loveth best this gentil formel here;  
 For everich hath swich replicacioun,  
 That noon by skilles may be broght a-doun;  
 I can not seen that argumentes avayle;  
 Than semeth hit ther moste be batayle.'

540 'Al redy!' quod these egles tercelles tho.  
 'Nay, sirs!' quod he, 'if that I dorste it seye,  
 Ye doon me wrong, my tale is not y-do!  
 For sirs, ne taketh noght a-gref, I preye,  
 It may noght gon, as ye wolde, in this weye;  
 545 Oure is the voys that han the charge in honde,  
 And to the juges dome ye moten stonde;

'And therfor, pees! I seye, as to my wit,  
 Me wolde thinke how that the worthieste  
 Of knighthode, and lengest hath used it,  
 550 Moste of estat, of blode the gentileste,  
 Were sittingest for hir, if that hir leste;  
 And of these three she wot hir-self, I trowe,  
 Which that he be, for it is light to knowe.'

Nature, who had always an ear to the murmuring of folly at the back, said with ready tongue, "Hold your peace there! And straightway, I hope, I shall find a counsel to let you go and release you from this noise. My judgment is that you shall choose one from each bird-folk to give the verdict for you all."

The birds all assented to this conclusion. And first the birds of prey by full election chose the tercel-falcon to define all their judgment, and decide as he wished. And they presented him to Nature and she accepted him gladly.

The falcon then spoke in this fashion: "It would be hard to determine by reason which best loves this gentle woman; for each has such ready answers that none may be defeated by reasons. I cannot see of what avail are arguments; so it seems there must be battle."

"All ready!" then cried these tercel-eagles. "Nay, sirs," said he, "if I dare say it, you do me wrong, my tale is not done. For, sirs, take it not amiss, I pray, it cannot go thus as you desire. Ours is the voice that has the charge over this, and you must stand by the judges' decision."

Peace, therefore! I say that it would seem in my mind that the worthiest in knighthood, who has longest followed it, the highest in degree and of gentlest blood, would be most fitting for her, if she wish it. And of these three she knows which he is, I believe, for that is easily seen."



555 The water-foules han her hedes leyd  
 Togeder, and of short avysement,  
 Whan everich had his large golee seyde,  
 They seyden soothly, al by oon assent,  
 How that the goos, with hir facounde gent,  
 That so desyreth to pronounce our nede,  
 560 Shal telle our tale,' and preyde 'God hir spede.'

And for these water-foules tho began  
 The goos to speke, and in hir cakeling  
 She seyde, 'Pees! now tak kepe every man,  
 And herkeneth which a reson I shal bringe;  
 565 My wit is sharp, I love no taryinge;  
 I seye, I rede him, though he were my brother,  
 But she wol love him, lat him love another!'

'Lo here a parfit reson of a goos!  
 Quod the sperhawk; 'never mot she thee!  
 570 Lo, swich it is to have a tonge loos!  
 Now parde, fool, yet were hit bet for thee  
 Han holde thy pees, than shewed thy nycete!  
 It lyth not in his wit nor in his wille,  
 But sooth is seyde, "a fool can noght be stille."

575 The laughter aroos of gentil foules alle,  
 And right anon the seed-foul chosen hadde  
 The turtel trewe, and gonne hir to hem calle,  
 And preyden hir to seye the sothe sadde  
 Of this matere, and asked what she radde;  
 580 And she answerde, that pleyntly hir entente  
 She wolde shewe, and soothly what she mente.

'Nay, God forbede a lover shulde chaunge!  
 The turtle seyde, and wex for shame al reed;  
 'Thogh that his lady ever-more be straunge,  
 585 Yet let him serve hir ever, til he be deed;  
 For sothe, I preysenoght the gooses reed;  
 For thogh she deyed, I wolde non other make,  
 I wol ben hires, til that the deeth me take.'

The waterfowl put their heads together, and after short considering, when each had spoken his tedious gabble, they said truly, by one assent, how "the goose, with her gentle eloquence, who so desires to speak for us, shall say our say," and prayed God would help her.

Then the goose began to speak for these waterfowl, and said in her cackling, "Peace! Now every man take heed and hearken what argument I shall put forth. My wits are sharp, I love no delay; I counsel him, I say, even if he were my brother, leave him if she will not love him."

"Lo here," said the sparrow-hawk, "a perfect argument for a goose--bad luck to her! Lo, thus it is to have a wagging tongue! Now, fool, it would be better for you to have held your peace than have shown your folly, by God! But to do thus rests not in her wit or will; for it is truly said, 'a fool cannot be silent.'"

Laughter arose from all the birds of noble kind; and straightway the seed-eating fowl chose the faithful turtle-dove, and called her to them, and prayed her to speak the sober truth about this matter, and asked her counsel. And she answered that she would fully show her mind.

"Nay, God forbid a lover should change!" said the turtle-dove, and grew all red with shame. "Though his lady may be cold for evermore, let him serve her ever until he die. In truth I praise not the goose's counsel, for even if my lady died I would have no other mate, I would be hers until death take me."

590     `Wel bourded!' quod the doke, `by my hat!  
       That men shulde alwey loven, causeles,  
       Who can a resoun finde or wit in that?  
       Daunceth he mury that is mirthelees?  
       Who shulde recche of that is recchelees?  
       Ye, quek!' quod the doke, ful wel and faire,  
 595     `There been mo sterres, God woot, than a paire!'

      `Now fy, cherl!' quod the gentil tercelet,  
       `Out of the dunghil com that word ful right,  
       Thou canst noght see which thing is wel be-set:  
       Thou farest by love as oules doon by light,  
 600     The day hem blent, ful wel they see by night;  
       Thy kind is of so lowe a wrechednesse,  
       That what love is, thou canst nat see ne gesse.'

      Tho gan the cukkow putte him forth in prees  
       For foul that eteth worm, and seide blyve,  
 605     `So I,' quod he, `may have my make in pees,  
       I recche not how longe that ye stryve;  
       Lat ech of hem be soleyn al hir lyve,  
       This is my reed, syn they may not acorde;  
       This shorte lesson nedeth noght recorde.'

610     `Ye! have the glotoun fild ynogh his paunche,  
       Than are we wel!' seyde the merlioun;  
       `Thou mordrer of the heysugge on the braunche  
       That broghte thee forth, thou rewthelees glotoun!  
       Live thou soleyn, wormes corrupcioun!  
 615     For no fors is of lakke of thy nature;  
       Go, lewed be thou, whyl the world may dure!'

      `Now pees,' quod Nature, `I comaunde here;  
       For I have herd al your opinioun,  
       And in effect yet be we never the nere;  
 620     But fynally, this is my conclusioun,  
       That she hir-self shal han the eleccioun  
       Of whom hir list, who-so be wrooth or blythe,  
       Him that she cheest, he shal hir have as swythe.

"By my hat, well jested!" said the duck. "That men should love forever, without cause! Who can find reason or wit there? Does one who is mirthless dance merrily? Who should care for him who is carefree? Yea, quack!" said the duck loud and long, "God knows there are more stars than a pair."

"Now fie, churl!" said the noble falcon. "That thought came straight from the dunghill. You cannot see when a thing is proper. You fare with love as owls with light; the day blinds them, but they see very well in darkness. Your nature is so low and wretched that you cannot see or guess what love is."

Then the cuckoo thrust himself forward in behalf of the worm-eating birds, and said quickly, "So that I may have my mate in peace, I care not how long you contend. Let each be single all his life; that is my counsel, since they cannot agree. This is my instruction, and there an end!"

"Yea," said the merlin, "as this glutton has well filled his paunch, this should suffice for us all! You murderer of the hedge-sparrow on the branch, the one who brought you up, you ruthless glutton! May you live unmated, you mangler of worms! It matters nothing to you, though your tribe may perish. Go, be a stupid fool, as long as the world lasts!"

"Peace now, I command here," said Nature, "For I have heard the opinions of all, and yet we are no nearer to our goal. But this is my final decision, that she herself shall have the choice of whom she wishes. Whosoever may be pleased or not, he whom she chooses shall have her straightway."

625 For sith it may not here discussed be  
 Who loveth hir best, as seide the tercelet,  
 Than wol I doon hir this favour, that she  
 Shal have right him on whom hir herte is set,  
 And he hir that his herte hath on hir knet.  
 Thus juge I, Nature, for I may not lye;  
 630 To noon estat I have non other ye.

But as for counseyl for to chese a make,  
 If it were reson, certes, than wolde I  
 Counseyle yow the royal tercel take,  
 As seide the tercelet ful skilfully,  
 635 As for the gentilest and most worthy,  
 Which I have wroght so wel to my plesaunce;  
 That to yow oghte been a suffisaunce.'

With dredful vois the formel hir answerde,  
 'My rightful lady, goddesse of Nature,  
 640 Soth is that I am ever under your yerde,  
 Lyk as is everich other creature,  
 And moot be youres whyl that my lyf may dure;  
 And therfor graunteth me my firste bone,  
 And myn entente I wol yow sey right sone.'

645 'I graunte it you,' quod she; and right anoon  
 This formel egle spak in this degree,  
 'Almighty quene, unto this yeer be doon  
 I aske respit for to avysen me.  
 And after that to have my choys al free;  
 650 This al and sum, that I wolde speke and seye;  
 Ye gete no more, al-though ye do me deye.

I wol noght serven Venus ne Cupyde  
 For sothe as yet, by no manere wey.'  
 'Now sin it may non other wyse betyde,'  
 655 Quod Nature, 'here is no more to sey;  
 Than wolde I that these foules were a-wey  
 Ech with his make, for taryng lenger here' --  
 And seyde hem thus, as ye shul after here.

For since it cannot here be debated who loves her best, as the falcon said,  
 then will I grant her this favor, that she shall have him alone on whom her  
 heart is set, and he her that has fixed his heart on her. This judgment I,  
 Nature, make; and I cannot speak falsely, nor look with partial eye on any  
 rank.

But if it is reasonable to counsel you in choosing a mate, then surely I  
 would counsel you to take the royal tercel, as the falcon said right wisely;  
 for he is noblest and most worthy whom I created so well for my own  
 pleasure; that ought to suffice you."

The formel answered with timid voice, "Goddess of nature, my righteous  
 lady, true it is that I am ever under your rod, just as every other creature is,  
 and I must be yours as long as my life may last. Therefore, grant me my  
 first request, and straightway I will speak to you my mind."

"I grant it to you," said Nature; and this female eagle spoke immediately in  
 this way: "Almighty queen, until this year comes to an end I ask respite, to  
 take counsel with myself; and after that to have my choice free. This is all  
 that I would say. I can say no more, even if you were to slay me.

In truth, as yet I will in no manner serve Venus or Cupid."  
 "Now since it can happen no other way," Nature said then, "there is no more  
 to be said here. Then I wish these birds to go their way each with his mate,  
 so that they tarry here no longer." And she spoke to them thus as you shall  
 hear.

660 `To you speke I, ye tercelet, ' quod Nature,  
 `Beth of good herte and serveth, alle three;  
 A yeer is not so longe to endure,  
 And ech of yow peyne him, in his degree,  
 For to do wel; for, God woot, quit is she  
 Fro yow this yeer; what after so befalle,  
 665 This entremes is dressed for you alle.'  
  
 And whan this werk al broght was to an ende,  
 To every foule Nature yaf his make  
 By even acorde, and on hir wey they wende.  
 And, Lord, the blisse and joye that they make!  
 670 For ech of hem gan other in winges take,  
 And with hir nekkes ech gan other winde,  
 Thanking alwey the noble goddesse of kinde.  
  
 But first were chosen foules for to singe,  
 As yeer by yere was alwey hir usaunce  
 675 To singe a roundel at hir departinge,  
 To do to Nature honour and plesaunce.  
 The note, I trowe, maked was in Fraunce;  
 The wordes wer swich as ye may heer finde,  
 The nexte vers, as I now have in minde.  
  
 680 Now welcom somer, with thy sonne softe,  
 That hast this wintres weders over-shake,  
 And driven away the longe nightes blake!  
  
 `Saynt Valentyn, that art ful hy on-lofte; --  
 Thus singen smale foules for thy sake --  
 685 Now welcom somer, with thy sonne sonne,  
 That hast this wintres weders over-shake.  
  
 `Wel han they cause for to gladen ofte,  
 Sith ech of hem recovered hath his make;  
 Ful blisful may they singen whan they wake;  
 690 Now welcom somer, with thy sonne softe,  
 That hast this wintres weders over-shake,  
 And driven away the longe nightes blake.'

"To you I speak, you tercel, " said Nature. "Be of good heart, and continue in service, all three; a year is not so long to wait. And let each of you strive according to his degree to do well. For, God knows, she is departed from you this year; and whatsoever may happen afterwards, this interval is appointed to you all."

And when this work was all brought to an end, Nature gave every bird his mate by just accord, and they went their way. Ah, Lord! The bliss and joy that they made! For each of them took the other in his wings, and wound their necks about each other, ever thanking the noble goddess of nature.

But first were chosen birds to sing, as was always their custom year by year to sing a roundel at their departure, to honor Nature and give her pleasure. The tune, I believe, was made in France. The words were such as you may here find in these verses, as I remember them.

"Welcome, summer, with sunshine soft,  
 The winter's tempest you will break,  
 And drive away the long nights black!

Saint Valentine, throned aloft,  
 Thus little birds sing for your sake:  
 Welcome, summer, with sunshine soft,  
 The winter's tempest you will shake!

Good cause have they to glad them oft,  
 His own true-love each bird will take;  
 Blithe may they sing when they awake,  
 Welcome, summer, with sunshine soft,  
 The winter's tempest you will break,  
 And drive away the long nights black!"

And with the showting, whan hir song was do,  
That foules maden at hir flight a-way,  
695 I wook, and other bokes took me to  
To rede upon, and yet I rede alway;  
In hope, y-wis, to rede so som day  
That I shal mete som thing for to fare  
The bet; and thus to rede I nil not spare.

Explicit tractatus de Congregacione Volucrum die sancti Valentini tentum,  
secundum Galfridum Chaucers. Deo gracias.

And with the shouting that the birds raised, as they flew away when their  
song was done, I awoke; and I took up other books to read, and still I read  
always. In truth I hope so to read that some day I shall meet with something  
of which I shall fare the better. And so I will not cease to read.