

THE ASSEMBLY OF FOWLS.

[In "The Assembly of Fowls" -- which Chaucer's "Retractation" describes as "The Book of Saint Valentine's Day, or of the Parliament of Birds" -- we are presented with a picture of the mediaeval "Court of Love" far closer to the reality than we find in Chaucer's poem which bears that express title. We have a regularly constituted conclave or tribunal, under a president whose decisions are final. A difficult question is proposed for the consideration and judgment of the Court -- the disputants advancing and vindicating their claims in person. The attendants upon the Court, through specially chosen mouthpieces, deliver their opinions on the cause; and finally a decision is authoritatively pronounced by the president -- which, as in many of the cases actually judged before the Courts of Love in France, places the reasonable and modest wish of a sensitive and chaste lady above all the eagerness of her lovers, all the incongruous counsels of representative courtiers. So far, therefore, as the poem reproduces the characteristic features of procedure in those romantic Middle Age halls of amatory justice, Chaucer's "Assembly of Fowls" is his real "Court of Love;" for although, in the castle and among the courtiers of Admetus and Alcestis, we have all the personages and machinery necessary for one of those erotic contentions, in the present poem we see the personages and the machinery actually at work, upon another scene and under other guises. The allegory which makes the contention arise out of the loves, and proceed in the assembly, of the feathered race, is quite in keeping with the fanciful yet nature-loving spirit of the poetry of Chaucer's time, in which the influence of the Troubadours was still largely present. It is quite in keeping, also, with the principles that regulated the Courts, the purpose of which was more to discuss and determine the proper conduct of love affairs, than to secure conviction or acquittal, sanction or reprobation, in particular cases -- though the jurisdiction and the judgments of such assemblies often closely concerned individuals. Chaucer introduces us to his main theme through the vestibule of a fancied dream -- a method which he repeatedly employs with great relish, as for instance in "The House of Fame." He has spent the whole day over Cicero's account of the Dream of Scipio (Africanus the Younger); and, having gone to bed, he dreams that Africanus the Elder appears to him -- just as in the book he appeared to his namesake -- and carries him into a beautiful park, in which is a fair garden by a river-side. Here the poet is led into a splendid temple, through a crowd of courtiers allegorically representing the various instruments, pleasures, emotions, and encouragements of Love; and in the temple Venus herself is found, sporting with her porter Richess. Returning into the garden, he sees the Goddess of

Nature seated on a hill of flowers; and before her are assembled all the birds -- for it is Saint Valentine's Day, when every fowl chooses her mate. Having with a graphic touch enumerated and described the principal birds, the poet sees that on her hand Nature bears a female eagle of surpassing loveliness and virtue, for which three male eagles advance contending claims. The disputation lasts all day; and at evening the assembled birds, eager to be gone with their mates, clamour for a decision. The tercelet, the goose, the cuckoo, and the turtle -- for birds of prey, water-fowl, worm-fowl, and seed-fowl respectively -- pronounce their verdicts on the dispute, in speeches full of character and humour; but Nature refers the decision between the three claimants to the female eagle herself, who prays that she may have a year's respite. Nature grants the prayer, pronounces judgment accordingly, and dismisses the assembly; and after a chosen choir has sung a roundel in honour of the Goddess, all the birds fly away, and the poet awakes. It is probable that Chaucer derived the idea of the poem from a French source; Mr Bell gives the outline of a fabliau, of which three versions existed, and in which a contention between two ladies regarding the merits of their respective lovers, a knight and a clerk, is decided by Cupid in a Court composed of birds, which assume their sides according to their different natures. Whatever the source of the idea, its management, and the whole workmanship of the poem, especially in the more humorous passages, are essentially Chaucer's own.]

THE life so short, the craft so long to learn, Th'assay so hard, so sharp the
conquering, The dreadful joy, alway that *flits so yern;* *fleets so fast*
All this mean I by* Love, that my feeling *with reference to Astoneth*
with his wonderful working, *amazes So sore, y-wis, that,
when I on him think, Naught wit I well whether I fleet* or sink,
*float

For *all be* that I know not Love indeed, *albeit, although* Nor wot
how that he *quiteth folk their hire,* *rewards folk for Yet happeth me
full oft in books to read their service* Of his miracles, and of his
cruel ire; There read I well, he will be lord and sire; I dare not saye, that his
strokes be sore; But God save such a lord! I can no more.

Of usage, what for lust and what for lore, On bookes read I oft, as I you told.
But wherefore speak I alle this? Not yore Agone, it happed me for to behold
Upon a book written with letters old; And thereupon, a certain thing to
learn, The longe day full fast I read and yern.* *eagerly

For out of the old fieldes, as men saith, Cometh all this new corn, from year
to year; And out of olde bookes, in good faith, Cometh all this new science

shalt not miss To come swiftly unto that place dear, That full of bliss is, and
of soules clear.* *noble <6>

"And breakers of the law, the sooth to sayn, And likerous* folk, after that
they be dead, *lecherous Shall whirl about the world always in
pain, Till many a world be passed, *out of dread;* *without doubt*
And then, forgiven all their wicked deed, They shalle come unto that blissful
place, To which to come God thee sende grace!"

The day gan failen, and the darke night, That reaveth* beastes from their
business, *taketh away Berefte me my book for lack of light, And
to my bed I gan me for to dress,* *prepare Full fill'd of
thought and busy heaviness; For both I hadde thing which that I n'old,*
*would not And eke I had not that thing that I wo'ld.

But, finally, my spirit at the last, Forweary* of my labour all that day,
*utterly wearied Took rest, that made me to sleepe fast; And in my sleep I
mette,* as that I say, *dreamed How Africane, right in the
self array *same garb* That Scipio him saw before that tide,*
*time Was come, and stood right at my bedde's side.

The weary hunter, sleeping in his bed, To wood again his mind goeth anon;
The judge dreameth how his pleas be sped; The carter dreameth how his
cartes go'n; The rich of gold, the knight fights with his fone;* *foes
The sicke mette he drinketh of the tun; <7> The lover mette he hath his lady
won.

I cannot say, if that the cause were, For* I had read of Africane beforne,
*because That made me to mette that he stood there; But thus said he;
"Thou hast thee so well borne In looking of mine old book all to-torn, Of
which Macrobius *raught not a lite,* *recked not a little* That
somedea of thy labour would I quite." *I would reward you for
some of your labour* Cytherea, thou blissful Lady sweet! That with thy
firebrand dauntest *when thee lest,* *when you please* That madest me
this sweven* for to mette, *dream Be thou my help in this,
for thou may'st best! As wisly* as I saw the north-north-west, <8>
*surely When I began my sweven for to write, So give me might to rhyme it
and endite.* *write down

This foresaid Africane me hent* anon, *took And forth
with him unto a gate brought Right of a park, walled with greene stone; And
o'er the gate, with letters large y-wrought, There were verses written, as me
thought, On either half, of full great difference, Of which I shall you say the

plain sentence.*

*meaning

"Through me men go into the blissful place <9> Of hearte's heal and deadly woundes' cure; Through me men go unto the well of grace; Where green and lusty May shall ever dure; This is the way to all good adventure; Be glad, thou reader, and thy sorrow off cast; All open am I; pass in and speed thee fast."

"Through me men go," thus spake the other side, "Unto the mortal strokes of the spear, Of which disdain and danger is the guide; There never tree shall fruit nor leaves bear; This stream you leadeth to the sorrowful weir, Where as the fish in prison is all dry; <10> Th'eschewing is the only remedy."

These verses of gold and azure written were, On which I gan astonish'd to behold; For with that one increased all my fear, And with that other gan my heart to bold;* *take courage That one me het,* that other did me cold; *heated No wit had I, for error,* for to choose *perplexity, confusion To enter or fly, or me to save or lose.

Right as betwixten adamantes* two *magnets Of even weight, a piece of iron set, Ne hath no might to move to nor fro; For what the one may hale,* the other let;** *attract **restrain So far'd I, that *n'ist whether me was bet* *knew not whether it was T' enter or leave, till Africane, my guide, better for me* Me hent* and shov'd in at the gates wide. *caught

And said, "It standeth written in thy face, Thine error,* though thou tell it not to me; *perplexity, confusion But dread thou not to come into this place; For this writing *is nothing meant by* thee, *does not refer to* Nor by none, but* he Love's servant be; *unless For thou of Love hast lost thy taste, I guess, As sick man hath of sweet and bitterness.

"But natheless, although that thou be dull, That thou canst not do, yet thou mayest see; For many a man that may not stand a pull, Yet likes it him at wrestling for to be, And deeme* whether he doth bet,** or he; *judge **better And, if thou haddest cunning* to endite, *skill I shall thee showe matter *of to write."* *to write about*

With that my hand in his he took anon, Of which I comfort caught,* and went in fast. *took But, Lord! so I was glad and well-begone!* *fortunate For *over all,* where I my eyen cast, *everywhere* Were trees y-clad with leaves that ay shall last, Each in his kind, with colour fresh and green As emerald, that joy it was to see'n.

The builder oak; and eke the hardy ash; The pillar elm, the coffer unto
carrain; The box, pipe tree; the holm, to whippe's lash The sailing fir; the
cypress death to plain; The shooter yew; the aspe for shaftes plain; Th'olive
of peace, and eke the drunken vine; The victor palm; the laurel, too, divine.
<11>

A garden saw I, full of blossom'd boughes, Upon a river, in a greene mead,
Where as sweetness evermore enow is, With flowers white, blue, yellow, and
red, And colde welle* streames, nothing dead, *fountain That
swamme full of smalle fishes light, With finnes red, and scales silver bright.

On ev'ry bough the birdes heard I sing, With voice of angels in their
harmony, That busied them their birdes forth to bring; The pretty conies* to
their play gan hie; *rabbits **haste And further all about I gan espy
The dreadful* roe, the buck, the hart, and hind, *timid Squirrels,
and beastes small, of gentle kind.* *nature

Of instruments of stringes in accord Heard I so play a ravishing sweetness,
That God, that Maker is of all and Lord, Ne hearde never better, as I guess:
Therewith a wind, unneth* it might be less, *scarcely Made in
the leaves green a noise soft, Accordant* the fowles' song on loft.** *in
keeping with **above

Th'air of the place so attemper* was, *mild That ne'er was
there grievance* of hot nor cold; *annoyance There was eke ev'ry
wholesome spice and grass, Nor no man may there waxe sick nor old: Yet*
was there more joy a thousand fold *moreover Than I can tell,
or ever could or might; There ever is clear day, and never night.

Under a tree, beside a well, I sey* *saw Cupid our lord
his arrows forge and file;* *polish And at his feet his bow all
ready lay; And well his daughter temper'd, all the while, The heades in the
well; and with her wile* *cleverness She couch'd* them after, as
they shoulde serve *arranged in order Some for to slay, and some to
wound and kerve.* *carve, cut

Then was I ware of Pleasance anon right, And of Array, and Lust, and
Courtesy, And of the Craft, that can and hath the might To do* by force a
wight to do folly; *make Disfigured* was she, I will not
lie; *disguised And by himself, under an oak, I guess, Saw I
Delight, that stood with Gentleness.

Then saw I Beauty, with a nice attire, And Youthe, full of game and jollity,
Foolhardiness, Flattery, and Desire, Messagerie, and Meed, and other three;
<12> Their names shall not here be told for me: And upon pillars great of
jasper long I saw a temple of brass y-founded strong.

And [all] about the temple danc'd alway Women enough, of whiche some
there were Fair of themselves, and some of them were gay In kirtles* all
dishevell'd went they there; *tunics That was their office* ever,
from year to year; *duty, occupation And on the temple saw I, white and
fair, Of doves sitting many a thousand pair. <13>

Before the temple door, full soberly, Dame Peace sat, a curtain in her hand;
And her beside, wonder discretely, Dame Patience sitting there I fand,*
*found With face pale, upon a hill of sand; And althernext, within and eke
without, Behest,* and Art, and of their folk a rout.** *Promise **crowd

Within the temple, of sighes hot as fire I heard a swough,* that gan aboute
ren,** *murmur **run Which sighes were engender'd with desire,
That made every hearte for to bren* *burn Of newe
flame; and well espied I then, That all the cause of sorrows that they drie*
*endure Came of the bitter goddess Jealousy.

The God Priapus <14> saw I, as I went Within the temple, in sov'reign place
stand, In such array, as when the ass him shent* <15> *ruined
With cry by night, and with sceptre in hand: Full busily men gan assay and
fand* *endeavour Upon his head to set, of sundry hue,
Garlandes full of freshe flowers new.

And in a privy corner, in disport, Found I Venus and her porter Richess,
That was full noble and hautain* of her port; *haughty <16> Dark
was that place, but afterward lightness I saw a little, unneth* it might be
less; *scarcely And on a bed of gold she lay to rest, Till that the
hote sun began to west.* *decline towards the wesr

Her gilded haire with a golden thread Y-bounden were, untressed,* as she
lay; *loose And naked from the breast unto the head Men
might her see; and, soothly for to say, The remnant cover'd, welle to my
pay,* *satisfaction <17> Right with a little kerchief of Valence;<18>
There was no thicker clothe of defence.

The place gave a thousand savours swoot;* *sweet And
Bacchus, god of wine, sat her beside; And Ceres next, that *doth of hunger
boot;* <19> *relieves hunger* And, as I said, amiddes* lay Cypride, <20>

*in the midst To whom on knees the younge folke cried To be their help: but thus I let her lie, And farther in the temple gan espy,

<See note 21 for the stories of the lovers in the next two stanzas>

That, in despite of Diana the chaste, Full many a bowe broke hung on the wall, Of maidens, such as go their time to waste In her service: and painted over all Of many a story, of which I touche shall A few, as of Calist', and Atalant', And many a maid, of which the name I want.* *do not have

Semiramis, Canace, and Hercules, Biblis, Dido, Thisbe and Pyramus, Tristram, Isoude, Paris, and Achilles, Helena, Cleopatra, Troilus, Scylla, and eke the mother of Romulus; All these were painted on the other side, And all their love, and in what plight they died.

When I was come again into the place That I of spake, that was so sweet and green, Forth walk'd I then, myselfe to solace: Then was I ware where there sat a queen, That, as of light the summer Sunne sheen Passeth the star, right so *over measure* *out of all proportion* She fairer was than any creature.

And in a lawn, upon a hill of flowers, Was set this noble goddess of Nature; Of branches were her halles and her bowers Y-wrought, after her craft and her measure; Nor was there fowl that comes of engendrure That there ne were prest,* in her presence, *ready <22> To *take her doom,* and give her audience. *receive her decision*

For this was on Saint Valentine's Day, When ev'ry fowl cometh to choose her make,* *mate Of every kind that men thinke may; And then so huge a noise gan they make, That earth, and sea, and tree, and ev'ry lake, So full was, that unnethes* there was space *scarcely For me to stand, so full was all the place.

And right as Alain, in his Plaint of Kind, <23> Deviseth* Nature of such array and face; *describeth In such array men mighte her there find. This noble Emperess, full of all grace, Bade ev'ry fowle take her owen place, As they were wont alway, from year to year, On Saint Valentine's Day to stande there.

That is to say, the *fowles of ravine* *birds of prey* Were highest set, and then the fowles smale, That eaten as them Nature would incline; As worme-fowl, of which I tell no tale; But waterfowl sat lowest in the dale, And

fowls that live by seed sat on the green, And that so many, that wonder was to see'n.

There mighte men the royal eagle find, That with his sharpe look pierceth the Sun; And other eagles of a lower kind, Of which that *clerkes well devise con; *which scholars well There was the tyrant with his feathers dun can describe* And green, I mean the goshawk, that doth pine* *cause pain To birds, for his outrageous ravine.* *slaying, hunting

The gentle falcon, that with his feet distraïneth* *grasps The kinge's hand; <24> the hardy* sperhawk eke, *pert The quaille's foe; the merlion <25> that paineth Himself full oft the larke for to seek; There was the dove, with her eyen meek; The jealous swan, against* his death that singeth; *in anticipation of The owl eke, that of death the bode* bringeth. *omen

The crane, the giant, with his trumpet soun'; The thief the chough; and eke the chatt'ring pie; The scorning jay; <26> the eel's foe the heroun; The false lapwing, full of treachery; <27> The starling, that the counsel can betray; The tame ruddock,* and the coward kite; *robin-redbreast The cock, that horologe* is of *thorpes lite.* *clock *little villages*

The sparrow, Venus' son; <28> the nightingale, That calleth forth the freshe leaves new; <29> The swallow, murd'rer of the bees smale, That honey make of flowers fresh of hue; The wedded turtle, with his hearte true; The peacock, with his angel feathers bright; <30> The pheasant, scorner of the cock by night; <31>

The waker goose; <32> the cuckoo ever unkind; <33> The popinjay,* full of delicacy; *parrot The drake, destroyer of his owen kind; <34> The stork, the wreaker* of adultery; <35> *avenger The hot cormorant, full of gluttony; <36> The raven and the crow, with voice of care; <37> The throstle old;* and the frosty fieldfare.<38> *long-lived

What should I say? Of fowls of ev'ry kind That in this world have feathers and stature, Men mighten in that place assembled find, Before that noble goddess of Nature; And each of them did all his busy cure* *care, pains Benignely to choose, or for to take, By her accord,* his formel <39> or his make.** *consent **mate

But to the point. Nature held on her hand A formel eagle, of shape the gentilest That ever she among her workes fand, The most benign, and eke

the goodliest; In her was ev'ry virtue at its rest,* *highest point
So farforth that Nature herself had bliss To look on her, and oft her beak to
kiss.

Nature, the vicar of th'Almighty Lord, -- That hot, cold, heavy, light, and
moist, and dry, Hath knit, by even number of accord, -- In easy voice began
to speak, and say: "Fowles, take heed of my sentence,"* I pray;
*opinion, discourse And for your ease, in furth'ring of your need, As far as I
may speak, I will me speed.

"Ye know well how, on Saint Valentine's Day, By my statute, and through
my governance, Ye choose your mates, and after fly away With them, as I
you *pricke with pleasance;* *inspire with pleasure* But natheless, as by
rightful ordinance, May I not let,* for all this world to win,
*hinder But he that most is worthy shall begin.

"The tercel eagle, as ye know full weel,* *well The fowl royal,
above you all in degree, The wise and worthy, secret, true as steel, The
which I formed have, as ye may see, In ev'ry part, as it best liketh me, -- It
needeth not his shape you to devise,* -- *describe He shall first
choose, and speaken *in his guise.* *in his own way*

"And, after him, by order shall ye choose, After your kind, evereach as you
liketh; And as your hap* is, shall ye win or lose; *fortune But
which of you that love most entriketh,* *entangles <40> God send
him her that sorest for him siketh."* *sigheth And therewithal the
tercel gan she call, And said, "My son, the choice is to thee fall.

"But natheless, in this condition Must be the choice of ev'reach that is here,
That she agree to his election, Whoso he be, that shoulde be her fere;*
*companion This is our usage ay, from year to year; And whoso may at this
time have this grace, *In blissful time* he came into this place." *in a
happy hour* With head inclin'd, and with full humble cheer,*
*demeanour

This royal tercel spake, and tarried not: "Unto my sov'reign lady, and not my
fere,* *companion I chose and choose, with will, and heart, and
thought, The formel on your hand, so well y-wrought, Whose I am all, and
ever will her serve, Do what her list, to do me live or sterve.*
*die

"Beseeching her of mercy and of grace, As she that is my lady sovereign, Or
let me die here present in this place, For certes long may I not live in pain;

For in my heart is carven ev'ry vein: *every vein in my heart is Having
regard only unto my truth, wounded with love* My deare heart,
have on my wesome ruth.* *pity

"And if that I be found to her untrue, Disobeisant,* or wilful negligent,
disobedient Avaunter, or *in process* love a new, *braggart *in the
course I pray to you, this be my judgement, of time* That
with these fowles I be all to-rent,* *torn to pieces That ilke* day
that she me ever find *same To her untrue, or in my
guilt unkind.

"And since none loveth her so well as I, Although she never of love me
behet,* *promised Then ought she to be mine, through her
mercy; For *other bond can I none on her knit;* *I can bind her no other
way* For weal or for woe, never shall I let* *cease, fail To serve
her, how far so that she wend;* *go Say what you list, my
tale is at anend."

Right as the freshe redde rose new Against the summer Sunne colour'd is,
Right so, for shame, all waxen gan the hue Of this formel, when she had
heard all this; *Neither she answer'd well, nor said amiss,* *she
answered nothing, So sore abashed was she, till Nature either
well or ill* Said, "Daughter, dread you not, I you assure."* *confirm,
support

Another tercel eagle spake anon, Of lower kind, and said that should not be;
"I love her better than ye do, by Saint John! Or at the least I love her as well
as ye, And longer have her serv'd in my degree; And if she should have lov'd
for long loving, To me alone had been the guerdoning.*
*reward

"I dare eke say, if she me finde false, Unkind, janglere,* rebel in any wise,
*boastful Or jealous, *do me hange by the halse;* *hang me by the
neck* And but* I beare me in her service *unless As well
ay as my wit can me suffice, From point to point, her honour for to save,
Take she my life and all the good I have."

A thirde tercel eagle answer'd tho:* *then "Now, Sirs, ye
see the little leisure here; For ev'ry fowl cries out to be ago Forth with his
mate, or with his lady dear; And eke Nature herselfe will not hear, For
tarrying her, not half that I would say; And but* I speak, I must for sorrow
dey.** *unless **die

Of long service avaunt* I me no thing, *boast But as
 possible is me to die to-day, For woe, as he that hath been languishing This
 twenty winter; and well happen may A man may serve better, and *more to
 pay,* *with more satisfaction* In half a year, although it were no more.
 Than some man doth that served hath *full yore.* *for a long time*

"I say not this by me for that I can Do no service that may my lady please;
 But I dare say, I am her truest man,* *liegeman, servant* As to
 my doom,* and faintest would her please; *in my judgement* At shorte
 words,* until that death me seize, *in one word* I will be hers,
 whether I wake or wink. And true in all that hearte may bethink."

Of all my life, since that day I was born, *So gentle plea,* in love or other
 thing, *such noble pleading* Ye hearde never no man me beforne;
 Whoso that hadde leisure and cunning* *skill For to
 rehearse their cheer and their speaking: And from the morrow gan these
 speches last, Till downward went the Sunne wonder fast.

The noise of fowles for to be deliver'd* *set free to depart So loude
 rang, "Have done and let us wend,"* *go That wellween'd I
 the wood had all to-shiver'd:* *been shaken to "Come off!" they cried;
 "alas! ye will us shend!*" pieces* *ruin When will your cursed pleading
 have an end? How should a judge either party believe, For yea or nay,
 withouten any preve?"* *proof

The goose, the duck, and the cuckoo also, So cried "keke, keke," "cuckoo,"
 "queke queke," high, That through mine ears the noise wente tho.*
 *then The goose said then, "All this n'is worth a fly! But I can shape hereof a
 remedy; And I will say my verdict, fair and swith,* *speedily For
 water-fowl, whoso be wroth or blith."* *glad

"And I for worm-fowl," said the fool cuckow; For I will, of mine own
 authority, For common speed,* take on me the charge now;
 *advantage For to deliver us is great charity." "Ye may abide a while yet,
 pardie,"* *by God Quoth then the turtle; "if it be your will
 A wight may speak, it were as good be still.

"I am a seed-fowl, one th'unworthiest, That know I well, and the least of
 cunning; But better is, that a wight's tongue rest, Than *entremette him of*
 such doing *meddle with* <41> Of which he neither rede* can
 nor sing; *counsel And who it doth, full foul himself
 accloyeth,* *embarrasseth For office uncommanded oft annoyeth."

Nature, which that alway had an ear To murmur of the lewedness behind,
With facond* voice said, "Hold your tongues there, *eloquent, fluent And I
shall soon, I hope, a counsel find, You to deliver, and from this noise
unbind; I charge of ev'ry flock* ye shall one call, *class of fowl To
say the verdict of you fowles all."

The tercelet* said then in this mannere; *male hawk "Full hard
it were to prove it by reason, Who loveth best this gentle formel here; For
ev'reach hath such replication,* *reply That by skilles*
may none be brought adown; *arguments I cannot see that
arguments avail; Then seemeth it that there must be battaile."

"All ready!" quoth those eagle tercelts tho;* *then "Nay, Sirs!"
quoth he; "if that I durst it say, Ye do me wrong, my tale is not y-do,*
*done For, Sirs, -- and *take it not agrief,* I pray, -- *be not offended* It
may not be as ye would, in this way: Ours is the voice that have the charge
in hand, And *to the judges' doom ye muste stand.* *ye must abide by
the judges' decision*" And therefore
'Peace!' I say; as to my wit, Me woulde think, how that the worthiest Of
knighthood, and had longest used it, Most of estate, of blood the gentilest,
Were fitting most for her, *if that her lest;* *if she pleased* And, of
these three she knows herself, I trow,* *am sure Which that he
be; for it is light* to know." *easy

The water-fowles have their heades laid Together, and *of short advisement,*
after brief deliberation When evereach his verdict had y-said They saide
soothly all by one assent, How that "The goose with the *facond gent,*
refined eloquence That so desired to pronounce our need,*
business Shall tell our tale;" and prayed God her speed.

And for those water-fowles then began The goose to speak. and in her
cackeling She saide, "Peace, now! take keep* ev'ry man, *heed
And hearken what reason I shall forth bring; My wit is sharp, I love no
tarrying; I say I rede him, though he were my brother, But* she will love
him, let him love another!" *unless

"Lo! here a perfect reason of a goose!" Quoth the sperhawke. "Never may she
the!* *thrive Lo such a thing 'tis t'have a tongue loose! Now,
pardie: fool, yet were it bet* for thee *better Have held thy
peace, than show'd thy nicety;* *foolishness It lies not in his wit,
nor in his will, But sooth is said, a fool cannot be still."

The laughter rose of gentle fowles all; And right anon the seed-fowls chosen

had The turtle true, and gan her to them call, And prayed her to say the
soothe sad *serious truth* Of this mattere, and asked what she
rad;* *counselled And she answer'd, that plainly her intent She
woulde show, and soothly what she meant.

"Nay! God forbid a lover shoulde change!" The turtle said, and wax'd for
shame all red: "Though that his lady evermore be strange,*
*disdainful Yet let him serve her ay, till he be dead; For, sooth, I praise not
the goose's rede* *counsel For, though she died, I would none
other make;* *mate I will be hers till that the death me take."

"Well boured!" quoth the ducke, "by my hat! *a pretty joke!* That
men should loven alway causeless, Who can a reason find, or wit, in that?
Danceth he merry, that is mirtheless? Who shoulde *reck of that is
reckeless?*" *care for one who has Yea! queke yet," quoth the duck,
"full well and fair! no care for him*" There be more starres, God wot, than a
pair!" <42>

"Now fy, churl!" quoth the gentle tercelet, "Out of the dunghill came that
word aright; Thou canst not see which thing is well beset; Thou far'st by
love, as owles do by light,-- The day them blinds, full well they see by night;
Thy kind is of so low a wretchedness, That what love is, thou caust not see
nor guess."

Then gan the cuckoo put him forth in press,* *in the crowd For
fowl that eateth worm, and said belive:* *quickly "So I," quoth
he, "may have my mate in peace, I recke not how longe that they strive. Let
each of them be solain* all their life; *single <43> This is my
rede,* since they may not accord; *counsel This shorte lesson
needeth not record."

"Yea, have the glutton fill'd enough his paunch, Then are we well!" saide the
emerlon;* *merlin "Thou murd'rer of the heggugg,* on the
branch *hedge-sparrow That brought thee forth, thou most rueful
glutton, <44> Live thou solain, worme's corruption! *For no force is to lack
of thy nature;* *the loss of a bird of your Go! lewed be thou, while the
world may dare!" depraved nature is no
matter of regret.* "Now peace," quoth Nature, "I commande here; For I have
heard all your opinion, And in effect yet be we ne'er the nere.*
*nearer But, finally, this is my conclusion, -- That she herself shall have her
election Of whom her list, whoso be *wroth or blith;* *angry or glad*
Him that she chooseth, he shall her have as swith.* *quickly

"For since it may not here discussed be Who loves her best, as said the
 tercelet, Then will I do this favour t' her, that she Shall have right him on
 whom her heart is set, And he her, that his heart hath on her knit: This
 judge I, Nature, for* I may not lie *because To none estate; I
 have none other eye. *can see the matter in
 no other light* "But as for counsel for to choose a make, If I were Reason,
 [certes] then would I Counsaile you the royal tercel take, As saith the
 tercelet full skilfully,* *reasonably As for the gentlest, and
 most worthy, Which I have wrought so well to my pleasance, That to you it
 ought be *a suffisance.*" *to your satisfaction*

With dreadful* voice the formel her answer'd: *frightened "My
 rightful lady, goddess of Nature, Sooth is, that I am ever under your yerd,*
 *rod, or government As is every other creature, And must be yours, while
 that my life may dure; And therefore grante me my firste boon,*
 *favour And mine intent you will I say right soon."

"I grant it you," said she; and right anon This formel eagle spake in this
 degree:* *manner "Almighty queen, until this year be done I
 aske respite to advise me; And after that to have my choice all free; This is
 all and some that I would speak and say; Ye get no more, although ye *do
 me dey.* *slay me*

"I will not serve Venus, nor Cupide, For sooth as yet, by no manner [of]
 way." "Now since it may none other ways betide,"* *happen
 Quoth Dame Nature, "there is no more to say; Then would I that these
 fowles were away, Each with his mate, for longer tarrying here." And said
 them thus, as ye shall after hear.

"To you speak I, ye tercel, " quoth Nature; "Be of good heart, and serve her
 alle three; A year is not so longe to endure; And each of you *pain him* in
 his degree *strive* For to do well, for, God wot, quit is she
 From you this year, what after so befall; This *entremess is dressed* for you
 all." *dish is prepared*

And when this work y-brought was to an end, To ev'ry fowle Nature gave his
 make, By *even accord,* and on their way they wend: *fair agreement*
 And, Lord! the bliss and joye that they make! For each of them gan other in
 his wings take, And with their neckes each gan other wind,* *enfold,
 caress Thanking alway the noble goddess of Kind.

But first were chosen fowles for to sing,-- As year by year was alway their
 usance,* -- *custom To sing a roundel at their departing, To do

to Nature honour and pleasance; The note, I trowe, maked was in France;
The wordes were such as ye may here find The nexte verse, as I have now in
mind:

Qui bien aime, tard oublie. <45>

"Now welcome summer, with thy sunnes soft, That hast these winter
weathers overshake * *dispersed, overcome Saint Valentine, thou art
full high on loft, Which driv'st away the longe nightes blake; *
*black Thus singe smalle fowles for thy sake: Well have they cause for to
gladden* oft, *be glad, make mirth Since each of them recover'd hath
his make;* *mate Full blissful may they sing when they
awake."

And with the shouting, when their song was do,* *done That the
fowls maden at their flight away, I woke, and other bookes took me to, To
read upon; and yet I read alway. I hope, y-wis, to reade so some day, That I
shall meete something for to fare The bet;* and thus to read I will not spare.
*better

Explicit.*

*the end