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“Parlement of Foules” and “New Council”: medieval assemblies of animals in an Anglo-Bohemian perspective.

BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE

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Rád bych tímto poděkoval vedoucímu mé práce docentu Janu Čermákovi, a to zejména za ochotu a vstřícnost, se kterou přijímal mé zbrklé rukopisy, a za klid, který mi za všech okolností dodával. Dále bych rád poděkoval svému kamarádovi Petru Kulhánkovi za dobrou vůli, se kterou poslouchal mé dlouhosáhlé monology o středověké literatuře.

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Souhlasím se zapůjčením bakalářské práce ke studijním účelům.

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Abstract

The thesis compares two late 14th century animal allegories, Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Parliament of Fowls* on the English side and Smil Flaška of Pardubice's *The New Council* on the Bohemian. After an introduction dealing with the datings and possible genetic relationship between the texts, they are approached in search of parallel structural features and of commonly shared *topoi*.

Chapter 1 demonstrates how the two authors use the identical devices to persuade the reader to comprehend nature as an allegory, chiefly the antrophomorphisation of animals – the beasts and birds gain human attributes, human attitudes, but also human physique; on the basis of their natural and symbolical properties, animals represent human values and social classes, while systems of natural classification and hierarchy are transposed into human social organisations.

Chapter 2 looks at how the human community is allegorised in the two poems as a body politic in practical terms, how the animals are made to deliberate, debate and take part in a sophisticated social arrangement. Each of the two imaginary assemblies mimics surprisingly closely those held by the political representatives of the two realms at the time of composition; representing real-world power structures and communicative frameworks, the allegories portray the Bohemian and English polities in striking detail – from the monarch's position through to the decision-making process as such. Close comparison then shows that the political philosophy behind the two texts, concerning the management of human polity, is fundamentally identical.

In chapter 3, with the help of late medieval philosophical and theological concepts, a transition is made from common political ideology towards features the two poems share in the areas of cosmology and eschatology. The analysis shows how the political message is in both poems complemented with and presupposed by a spiritual one, how both poems set forth universal belief systems before the reader and attempt to aid him to make the right decisions in problems which these belief systems pose.

Abstrakt

Práce srovnává dvě zvířecí alegorie pocházející ze závěru 14. století, *Ptačí sněm* Geoffreye Chaucera na anglické straně a *Novou radu* Smila Flašky z Pardubic na české. Po stručném úvodu, zabývajícím se datací obou textů a možným přímým vztahem mezi nimi, se práce snaží hledat *topoi* sdílená oběma básněmi a obdobné strukturní prvky v nich obsažené.

První kapitola demonstruje, jakými způsoby oba autoři užívají totožných prostředků k tomu, aby přesvědčili čtenáře, že má přírodu vnímat alegoricky, přičemž hlavní místo mezi těmito prostředky zaujímá antropomorfizace zvířat: pozemská zvířata i ptáci získávají lidské vlastnosti, lidské potoje, ale také lidskou stavbu těla; zvířata na základě svých přírodních či symbolických znaků zastupují lidské hodnoty a společenské skupiny, přičemž systémy třídění a hierarchikého členění přírody jsou metaforicky přeneseny na lidské systémy společenské organizace.

Druhá kapitola sleduje, jak je v obou básních lidská komunita alegorizována jako politické uskupení, a to v praxi, tedy jak oba autoři přimějí zvířata uvažovat, debatovat a účastnit se sofistikovaného společenského uspořádání. Obě fiktivní shromáždění napodobují s překvapivou doslovností skutečná shromáždění, kterých se pravidelně účastnila tehdejší politická reprezentace příslušných království. Obě alegorie čtenáři představují skutečné mocenské struktury a komunikační rámce, a líčí tak české i anglické politické zřízení neobyčejně podrobně – od postavení monarchy až po samotný rozhodovací proces. Následné detailní strovnání ukazuje, že politická filosofie zabývající se spravováním lidského státu, která leží v pozadí obou textů, je v základě totožná.

Ve třetí kapitole se s pomocí pozdně středověkých filosofických a teologických konceptů dostáváme od společné politické ideologie k prvkům, jež obě básně sdílejí v oblasti kosmologie a eschatologie. V analýze se ukazuje, jakým způsobem je politické poselství v obou textech doplněno a podmíněno poselstvím duchovním a jak před čtenáře obě básně předkládají univerzální věroučné soustavy a snaží se mu pomoci konat v jejich rámci správná rozhodnutí.

All quotations are taken from the latest authoritative editions, *The Parliament of Fowls* from Brewer's 1987 *Riverside Chaucer*, *The New Council* from Daňhelka's 1950 edition *Nová rada*. Translations from *The New Council* (as well as other Czech sources) are mine own and do not pretend to become the definite authority for possible future readers. Where applicable, I have consulted and used the few lines translated for illustration by Francis Count Lützow for his 1899 *History of Bohemian Literature* but mostly had to emend them as too loose for my purposes. In the translation, I keep the Czech idiom in not capitalizing the first letter of the verse. I have, on the other hand, capitalized the animal names to distinguish references to the animal speakers of *The New Council* (i.e. the Wolf or the Nightingale) from the species as a whole (wolf, nightingale). All italics in quotations from the two primary sources are mine, intended for emphasis.

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Introduction

The idea of comparing Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Parliament of Fowls* and Smil Flaška of Pardubice's *The New Council* was originally based on simple premises, accidental and incidental: both poems come from roughly the same time, both target aristocratic audiences and, most importantly, they share the form of an animal assembly, a *consilium*. These are the major points of analogy – due to which, there even appeared some time ago a critical opinion that the two poems could be realted genetically[1] –, beyond these, each poem keeps its own specificity: as far as genre is considered, the two texts have been subject to views radically disparate. If purpose and theme are to be taken as the chief indicator of genre, the Bohemian composition cannot be mistaken for anything else than the didactic genre of *speculum regis*, a mirror for princes concerned fully with the question of good and bad government, a designation hardly fitting to amply define the Middle English text.[2]

Chaucer, on the other hand, introduces a number of themes and his purpose is much harder to discern, and so critics first determined genre with regard to Chaucer's apparent indebtedness to Franco-Italian traditions of love poems, animal allegories and dream visions.[3] *The Parliament of Fowls* had thus been, up to the 1960's, interpreted mostly in accordance with only one of its themes and identified as a 'love-vision' and *demande d'amour*, a 'question of love'.[4] Since then, other themes have drawn critical interest too and the poem has been approached from a multitude of angles ranging from epistemology[5] to psychoanalysis[6] to ecocriticism[7]; however much these new views have advanced our insight, the strand of criticism most vital to understanding the text in its historical context regards *The Parliament of Fowls* as a "great civic poem, concerned […] with the foundations of human community",[8] a concern similar to that of *The New Council*. This thesis should show that the

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1 Which is the principal reason why considerable space within the introduction shall be devoted to the questions of dating and possible relationship.

2 For the minor view that Chaucer intended the poem as a *speculum principis* for the yound Richard II, see Ordelle G. Hill and Gardiner Stillwell, "A Conduct Book for Richard II," *Philological Quarterly* 73.3 (1994): 317-29.

3 Clive S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (London: Oxford UP, 1973), 171-6.

4 Derek S. Brewer, "Introduction," *The Parlement of Foulys*, by Geoffrey Chaucer (London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1960) 7-13.

5 David Aers, "The Parliament of Fowls: Authority, the Knower and the Known," *Chaucer's Dream Visions and Shorter Poems*, ed. William A. Quinn (New York, NY: Garland, 1999) 270-98.

6 Theresa M. Krier, "From Aggression to Gratitude: Air and Song in the *Parlement of Foules*," *Birth Passages: Maternity and Nostalgia, Antiquity to Shakespeare* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2001) 109-138.

7 Lisa J. Kiser, "Chaucer and the Politics of Nature," *Beyond Nature Writing: Expanding the Boundaries of Ecocriticism*, edd. Karla Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace (Charlottesville, VA: UP of Virginia, 2001) 41-56.

8 Paul A. Olson, "The Parlement of Foules: Aristotle's Politics and the Foundations of Human Society,"

two authors, even if their purpose and genre rooting may appear quite different, use a set of literary devices pertinent to their chosen form of allegory to construct political statements which are fundamentally parallel.

Plots and Structure

In short summary, *The Parliament of Fowls* comprises of three principal parts. In the first (1-119), the narrator introduces himself as a book-reader who tries to find lore on the topic of love but cannot, and recounts in several stanzas *Somnium Scipionis*, a late antique dream vision extremely popular in the Middle Ages, in which Scipio Africanus counsels his grandson on the right conduct of life. Then the narrator himself falls asleep and, under the influence of his book, dreams of Scipio appearing to him. In the second part (120-294), Scipio literally shoves the initially reluctant narrator into the garden of love where he, now alone, sees two distinct places representing first the good and then the bad side of love. The bad, venereal side of love is heavy with myths, history and personified vices, i.e. with world cultured by mankind, while the good, procreational one with peaceful natural imagery of birds and vegetation. In the final and longest part (295-700), which gave the poem its customary name, the narrator returns to the good-love place and witnesses the personification of Nature convoking birds on St. Valentine's day to choose their mates. As the three noblest birds, the eagles, compete rhetorically for one female eagle and no resolution is reached, Nature commands the lesser birds to advise how the stalemate should be overcome so as to allow all of them to proceed. The birds choose their representatives to put forward their ideas for a solution, but the *parlement* slides into a pointless argument and it is only Nature's intervention that saves the day. The female eagle, given the power of choice, asks for a year's delay which is granted – only then the other birds can choose their mates and in a roundel happily welcome the new vegetative year, waking up the narrator with their eventual shouting.

The New Council (or *Counsel* or *Advice*) is not necessarily simpler in its structure but certainly more unified. The opening sees the king Lion assembling his quadrupeds and asking the Eagle, the highest-ranking of his noblemen, to assemble all his birds. Stressing his youth and inexperience, he then asks for counsel from his underlings. After a polite protraction renouncing his authority, the Eagle gives prolonged, exalted advice in which the king is solicited to take seriously his vocation in this world, focussing almost exclusively on the

Chaucer's Dream Visions and Shorter Poems, ed. William A. Quinn (New York, NY: Garland, 1999) 270.

king's relationship with God as a determining factor of the quality of his rule. Then the other animals follow suit, birds alternating with earthlings, some offering good and some bad counsels on all aspects of governance, from spiritual through to very practical, totalling 44 pieces of advice, finally concluded by another long, powerfully devotional speech made by the Swan, now oriented towards the afterlife. Between the counsels, there is some, though not prominent, "stage business"[9] which maintains the sense of a parliamentary situation – the work is not a mere list of counsels. The frame set out in the beginning, a council, is not completed and instead, the frame-within-a-frame theme of piety and devotion is concluded by "Amen".

When remarking on *PF*, Spearing draws attention to the complexity of Chaucer's "*dispositio* – over-all structural arrangement", explaining that "the meaning of the poem is conveyed through certain contrasts embodied rather than stated in the dream-experience".[10] Dennis Walker has highlighted how by the means of *contentio*, the rhetorical figure of antithesis, from small contradictions to the overall design, Chaucer creates "relational constructions", meanings encoded only in the *relationship* of the otherwise discordant elements.[11] Somewhat similarly, Hrabák claims about *NC* that the "constructional principle of the composition is confrontation", *NC* being a series of counsels juxtaposed against one another so that they appear mutually supportive or exclusive. From such a construction ensues the general argument spanning across the whole of the poem – for *NC is* an argumentative poem.[12] In other words, the two texts function on the basis of antithesis, on the basis of presenting opposites and reconciling them into a coherent structure. This type of structure needs to be perceived by the reader only in its entirety, requiring him to make the connections between the confronted elements himself. This shared structural feature must be acknowledged before the analysis itself, for it will in different forms resurface in all three chapters of the thesis.

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[9] Robert G. Benson, *Medieval Body Language: A Study of the Use of Gesture in Chaucer's Poetry* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1980) 39.

[10] A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge: CUP, 1976) 99.

[11] Dennis Walker, "*Contentio*: The Structural Paradigm of *The Parliament of Fowls*." *Studies in the Age of Chaucer, Proceedings* 1 (1984): 176.

[12] Josef Hrabák, *Smilova škola. Rozbor básnické struktury. Studie Pražského lingvistického kroužku* č. 3 (Praha: Jednota českých matematiků a fysiků, 1941) 40. Hrabák posits *NC* as structurally somewhere between two contemporary from the same tradition: the monological *Advice of Father to his Son*, which in its setting of two participants only implies dialogue, and the satirical *Groom and Student* who actually do cue up on each other and engage in a dramatic exchange.

Structure of the Thesis

Presenting human values in bird-and-beast garb allows the authors to edify their readers – intimating to them, proceeding from concrete observations, abstract ideas of philosophical value – while still entertaining them with tales obviously narrated for the audience's pleasure. As they employ animals in the allegorical mode, the authors necessarily raise the question of relationships between the natural and the social dimensions of the world in human imagination; interestingly, Chaucer and Smil Flaška both reflect upon this problem quite intentionally, realizing the opportunities and limitations it poses for their literary undertaking. The authors' reflexivity of how their texts work within themselves and what effects they ultimately create are treated in Chapter 1, along with the question how the animal allegories allow to construe the human society as a stratified system of classes.

Chapter 2 looks at how the human community is allegorised in the two poems as a body politic in practical terms. *The New Council* and *The Parliament of Fowls* both see their animal participants posited into the distinctly human situation of a *parlement* or *consilium*, the authors making them deliberate, debate and take part in a sophisticated social arrangement. Each of the two imaginary assemblies mimics surprisingly closely those held by the political representatives of the two realms at the time of composition; representing real-world power structures and communicative frameworks, the allegories portray the Bohemian and English polities in striking detail – from the monarch's position through to the decision-making process as such.

Using the concepts and metaphors previously identified in Chaucer's and Smil's compositions, chapter 3 questions to what extent the similar political concerns and values of the two texts stem from a common perception of the world and of its structure. The belief systems in which the two poems are grounded are analysed and compared in their cosmology and eschatology. The analysis shows how the political message is in both poems complemented with and presupposed by a spiritual one, one that insists that man's undertaking should always take into account not only the human polity but also the eternal life.

Dating

As to the dates of composition of *The New Council* and *The Parliament of Fowls*, despite the amounts of scholarship devoted to the topic, absolute critical consensus has not been reached. The case of *The New Council* is less contested: the most persuasive argument[13] holds that it developed from what was originally a much shorter bird-parliament composition written for the occasion of Wenceslas IV's accession to throne after the demise of his father Charles IV in 1378 (and perhaps begun before it) – the so-called 'first redaction'. From it, only a ca. 400-line self-contained text of the opening and the Eagle's advice in a single copy survives. The text which in two 15th century manuscripts bears the name *The New Council* (hereafter referred to as *NC*) would then be a much later redaction from the 1390's. The 'second redaction theory' is supported by the dates of composition given in the explicit of the two extant manuscripts (1394 and 1395) and it could also explain[14] the curious qualifier *New*.

Most importantly, we find incorporated specific reflections upon the actual Wenceslas IV and his reign,[15] which sprain from the author's close experience with the state apparatus.[16] Having at our disposal 'only' two versions, the single counsel of an eagle and a bird-and-beast assembly giving forty-four, we cannot be certain in what stages the poem had developed although it seems plausible the bird element (as opposed to beasts) was stronger.[17] Originally a mirror for the acceding prince, by the late 14th century a fairly conventional genre – and one quite popular in the Bohemian environment[18] –, the text was reworked along an antithetical structure, with allegorical counsellors countering one another in what is, on the part of the author, an amalgam of well-meant advice, biting satire and deep-felt predicatory exhortation. Presumably, the composition had, in some form, existed from the late 1370's up until it was finally expanded into its pre-1396 shape, being subject to at least one major rewriting by Smil himself.[19]

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[13] Jan B. Čapek, "Vznik a funkce Nové rady," *Věstník Královské české společnosti nauk*, *Třída pro filosofii, historii a filologii* 1/38 (1938): 85-8.

[14] Ibid. 71-8.

[15] Ibid. 26f. This also makes *NC* a valuable source for historical research into the period, see Tomáš Linhart, *Nová rada urozeného pána Smila Flašky z Pardubic jako historický pramen*, MA Thesis (Praha: Univerzita Karlova, 2001).

[16] More on Smil's involvement in public affairs in chapter 2.3.

[17] Čapek, "Vznik a funkce" 85.

[18] Ibid. 50-61. In its devotional features, Smil's poem might have directly paraphrased the advice Charles IV. wrote himself for his son Wenceslas. See also note 60 below.

[19] Cf. Josef Tříška, *Literární a myšlenkové proudy latinsko-českého středověku: rétorika, etika, symbolika* (Praha: Národní knihovna ČR, 2004) 41, and Josef Tříška, *Předhusitské bajky* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 1990) 90, 94-95. Tříška's lone view that the poem was written by a high-ranking cleric who used Smil Flaška as a pseudonym for artistic purposes has no real foundation; it apparently comes as a transplant theory

The exact dating of *The Parliament of Fowls* (hereafter *PF*) proves more elusive as a much greater number of scholars have proposed contradictory and often precarious arguments.[20] As for hard evidence, we can only be sure that the poem had already been in existence by the time the original F version of the *Prologue to the Legend of Good Women*[21] was written. Given the revision in the *G Prologue*, we may be certain the *terminus ante quem* is 1394, the date of Anne of Bohemia's death,[22] though we can reasonably expect the time of composition to predate the Merciless Parliament of 1388 and even the Wonderful Parliament of 1386 in which Chaucer himself witnessed the collapse of the Ricardian cause.[23] The earliest possible date is even less certain, nonetheless it appears improbable that Chaucer gained inspiration to write about royal marriage negotiations before he actually began to take part in the business himself in 1377.[24]

The most widespread estimation qualifies *PF* as an occasional poem composed between 1379 and 1382, the time of the diplomatic wooing of Anne of Bohemia[25] – the sister of the King of Bohemia and ruler of the Holy Roman Empire Wenceslas IV – by the recently acceded Richard II, and of their subsequent wedding. This requires certain details contained in the text to be interpreted as in-references to concrete persons. If we agree that the poem was inspired by the marriage negotiations undertaken by the English court for Richard II,[26] it is tempting to see the first tercel eagle as the prince himself, given how much he is flattered by Nature as a royal bird above everybody else in rank, possessing all the chivalric qualities and formed by Nature to her own image (393-9).

The formel eagle is also "so wel iwrought" (418) by Nature and represents ideal queenly qualities (372-6), which could refer to Anne as a princess born into the highest possible, imperial rank. There are moreover some details pointing to the formel's youth

from Tříška's critical engagement with other texts of the period.

20 For an astute (though perhaps a little too hard-hitting) criticism of mindless Chaucer dating enterprises, see Kathryn L. Lynch, "Dating Chaucer," *The Chaucer Review* 42.1 (2007): 1-22. For an interesting possibility of a double redaction, see Bertrand H. Bronson, "The Parlement of Foules Revisited," *Chaucer's Dream Visions and Shorter Poems*, ed. William A. Quinn (New York, NY: Garland, 1999): 252-8.

21 *F Prologue to LGW*, line 419.

22 Derek Pearsall, "Introduction," *The Canterbury Tales*, by Geoffrey Chaucer (London: Routledge, 1985) 1-8.

23 Florence R. Scott, "Chaucer and the Parliament of 1386," *Speculum* 18.1 (1943): 80-6.

24 Larry D. Benson, "Introduction," *The Riverside Chaucer*, by Geoffrey Chaucer, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987) xxi.

25 Benson, Larry D. Benson, "The Occasion of the Parliament of Fowls," *The Wisdom of Poetry: Essays in Early English Literature in honor of Morton Bloomfield*, edd. Larry D. Benson and Siegfried Wenzel (Kalmazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1982) 123-44.

26 Nigel Saul, *Richard II* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1997) 83-91

and inexperience in the ways of love (442-8, 647-53) which could confirm her as Anne, who was only just reaching adulthood at the time of the negotiations. Heraldically speaking, Anne was being represented in England by the black eagle (the device coming down to her from her imperial father[27]), a usage attested in the chancel ceiling painting commemorative of her 1383 visit to St Helen hospital in Norwich[28] and later in the Wilton Diptych[29] and on the tomb in Westminster Abbey.[30] The two other suitors could represent other members of European nobility who strove for Anne's hand, but the alleged references are minute and by no means self-evident (450, 453, 474-6).

All in all, the reading which connects the poem to a certain occasion is inviting but, unlike in the case of *NC* where the real-life references must be at the core of critical attention, does not yield any strong, persuasive interpretive options. On the other hand, it is quite improbable that the poem would *not* refer to actual persons[31] and at least draw inspiration from the marriage negotiations with the Milanese, French and Bohemian sides, the more so that Chaucer was partly involved.[32] Exact dating, however, remains only in the realm of plausible conjectures and depends largely on belief, which is even more the case than with *NC*. One written during the reign of Richard II, the other in that of Wenceslas IV, the two compositions coincide, and it is the brief dynastic connection between the realms of Bohemia and England which has focalised the interest of critics on the possibility of interrelatedness between the two animal assemblies.

Possible Relationship

When Anne came to England in 1381 to marry Richard in January 1382, she brought along a lavish retinue of Bohemians who certainly became, yet to an unknown degree, a cultural nexus between Bohemia and England.[33] Through this nexus, some have

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[27] Her imperial descent was emphasised (though often complemented with a reference to Bohemia) not only in heraldry and allegory (*F Prologue*, line 185) but also directly. For eulogies of English provenance which note her imperial relatives, one of which labels her *inclita filia cezaris*, see Michael Van Dussen, "Three Verse Eulogies of Anne of Bohemia," *Medium Aevum* 78 (2009) 244f.

[28] "The History of the Great Hospital in Norwich," photographs and description, *The Great Hospital website*, 10 Aug. 2011 <http://www.greathospital.org.uk/history.shtml>.

[29] Shelagh Mitchell, "Richard II and the Broomcod Collar: New Evidence from the Issue Rolls," *Fourteenth Century England II*, ed. Chris Given-Wilson (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2002) 178. For more information on the use of Anne's devices in the Diptych, see *The Regal Image of Richard II and the Wilton Diptych*, edd. Dillan Gordon, Lisa Monnas and Caroline Elam, introd. by Caroline M. Barron (London: Harvey Miller, 1998).

[30] "The Tombs at Westminster Abbey," photographs and description, *Church Monuments Society website*, 10 Aug. 2011 <http://www.churchmonumentssociety.org/London_Westminster.html>.

[31] Bronson 254.

[32] See note 139. See also David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997) 367-8 and note 116 thereto.

[33] Wallace 349-78.

argued, Smil might have been inspired by Chaucer's composition or *vice versa*: the idea of a genetic connection between *The Parliament of Fowls* and *The New Council* had a long history, but to little avail.[34] The development of the argument became arrested in the contested datings, eventually slipping into circular logic; critics on the one side of the channel often took for granted what those on the other still debated heatedly, and based theories of influence on these unstable grounds. Bearing in mind that the attempts had been conducted up to early 1930's, we can now, in the light of more recent research, comment on the possibility of direct connection with some more certainty.

Timewise, it appears impossible that the final redaction of *NC*, written in mid-1390's, could inform Chaucer's *PF*, which must have been long completed at that point. For the first redaction to become an inspiration for Chaucer looks improbable even if it were written soon after the accession of Wenceslas and so before Anne's voyage to England – the original poem was a mirror for princes after Western models, the only original feature being its heightened devotional tone. Generally speaking, essays to glimpse Bohemian models in Chaucer seem quite futile, being based on very thin evidence.[35] That, contrarily, Smil would inspire himself by *PF* seems a little more feasible, though not at all inviting. Smil wrote the first version in the wake of other pieces of advice composed for the young Wenceslas, and so it could only be that he read, or heard of, *PF* afterwards and sought to remodel his composition after it. In here, I concur with Langhans in that the only real similarity is the idea of the animal assembly itself which was, however, a sub-genre of animal allegory known in both the French and German literary spaces,[36] and that the other internal similarities, such as profuse use of proverbs, are incidental to the time and social milieu of the compositions rather than revealing of their connection.[37]

There is one overlooked but noteworthy problem for the influence theory, that of language. Both works were written in the vernacular, just freshly emergent as a major medium of literary expression, and although the usage of both was ascending in manifold areas, English, and certainly Czech, were not yet dominant in their respective cultures;

[34] For a brief overview, see Čapek, "Alegorie" 5-6.

[35] There have been, for instance, claims that Chaucer's empowered female figures were inspired by the legendary story of the "Maiden's war", originally written down in Latin in the 12th century by the chronicler *Cosmas*.

[36] Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language, and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (Oxford: OUP) 121.

[37] Viktor Langhans, "Altes und Neues zu Chaucers Parlament of Foules," *Anglia: Zeitschrift für englische Philologie* 54 (1930): 25-66. Langhans, quite rightly, dispelled the ideas of interrelatedness based on internal evidence already in 1929.

in England, the esteemed literary vernacular was still French and in Bohemia, German.[38] It is also hard to imagine that 'cultural capital' intended for export would not have been chosen among Latin works, easily understood by any educated person.[39] That Smil knew any English is an idea as ridiculous as that of Chaucer poring over a poem not in Italian, French, English or Latin, but in Czech – by international standards, the vernaculars concerned were no *linguae francae*. Even though there was heightened contact between the English and Prague universities, there is virtually no Middle English extant in Bohemian manuscripts of English provenance.[40] That there occurred any translation of the rather minor Chaucer poem into a language intelligible to a Bohemia-based learned man (Latin, German or Czech) is pure fancy. Finally, if news of the composition were to be conveyed by word of mouth, it is even less likely they would exercise any impact in terms of inspiration.

Shortly, with no *evidence* that the poems influenced each another, the only route left consists in comparison based on close reading which can, unlike dubious claims of genetic connection, enhance our understanding of the two texts. Some comparative effort has been made, but Victor Langhans had not had the insight that later scholarship offered into *PF*[41] and Alfred Thomas devoted only a limited space to the topic in his broad-ranging treatment of 14th Bohemian literature from the English viewpoint.[42] Ernst Robert Curtius' *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* discovered for the literary scholar the now established category of *topoi*, or the *loci communes*, the 'commonplaces' as rendered rather unluckily in modern English. Topology as a discipline attempts to identify these shared elements as they stand; there is no initial pressure for a common genealogy. The appeal of this approach lies in the fact that it opens up possibilities to compare texts across geographical or chronological distances. In his Introduction to *PF*, Brewer himself mentions Curtius' critical method, nonetheless only in passing; furthermore, the commonplaces he lists bear only partial importance for

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[38] Esteemed and well-educated writers who apparently could express themselves in the emergent vernacular (or in Latin) still used French (or German, respectively) for elongated and intellectually ambitious compositions. Examples include John Gower's *Mirrour de l'Omme* or Johannes von Tepl's *Der Ackermann aus Boehmen*.

[39] For literature on transmission of Latin works of English provenance into Bohemia, see Wallace, note 98, 490.

[40] Van Dussen, 234.

[41] The background of political thought behind *PF*, for instance, had been largely unexplored until the last third of the 20th century.

[42] Alfred Thomas, *Anne's Bohemia: Czech Literature and Society, 1310-1420* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1998) 125-33.

our inquiry.[43] They are the *topoi* that Chaucer appropriated from his Latin, French and Italian readings – in a sense, Brewer utilized Curtius to demonstrate the genealogical roots of Chaucer's poetry (the dream setting, the enclosed garden etc.). As the aim of comparative approach should be to let texts inform mutually on each other, in the case of *PF* and *NC* it offers a chance to identify the poems' common grounds and eventually, having determined what features they share and in which they differ, perhaps to place them in specific contexts of late medieval literature.

[43] Brewer, "Introduction" 48.

1. How Allegory Works

The use of birds and beasts in both *NC* and *PF* to expose intrinsically human attributes is based on the same process – animals are always assigned human qualities on the grounds of their perceived traits upon which the culture agrees. The fox, because it often did harm to humans (for instance in killing their domestic animals) and is hard to catch, is associated with 'slyness' and all its aspects. There is even a whole medieval genre of mock romances stemming from much simpler fables in which the crucial role is played by the cheating and ignoble fox.[44] At some point, the one quality of the animal which is most ingrained in the culture supersedes all other attributes and the combination of the quality and the animal reaches proverbial or idiomatised use: thus, from the common characteristic of the *genus* that 'foxes are sly', we have adopted the idiom of 'sly as a fox'. The properties of the animal species, the bases for its recognisable allegorical use, were in medieval terminology called *proprietates* or *naturalia*. By late middle ages, 'properties' of all things, from God to stones, were easy to find in popular works of encyclopedic nature, either bestiaries *per se* or larger works which included descriptions of animals. Chaucer is known to have worked with Vincent de Beauvais' momentous *Speculum Naturale* and with Bartholomaeus Anglicus' *De Proprietatibus Rerum* (in *PF* especially book 12, *De avibus*), whose popularity is confirmed by John of Trevisa's ca. 1400 translation *On the Properties of Things*.[45]

Another source for authors of animal allegories, similar but not identical to bestiaries, were *fysiologi* which, after the bestiary entry proper, add a *moralitas*, a short Aesopian fable in which the described *proprietas* is used to convey a moral maxim.[46] Outside the descriptive, encyclopedic sphere, we know also collections of *exempla*, fables without the properties described, and *sententiae* to have been popular.[47] All these works

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[44] For a short overview of the tradition and a unique Middle English text of such a fable, see "The Fox and the Wolf," *Middle English Literature*, edd. Charles W. Dunn and Edward T. Byrnes (London: Routledge, 1990) 166-73. For an extended treatment of Reynardian and pre-Reynardian fox fable literature in England, see Nora Heij Mariano, *The Craft(ing) of Reynard: Dissecting the Trickster Fox in Medieval England*, BA Thesis (Mount Holyoke College, 2010).

[45] For sections corresponding with such treatises on nature, see Charles Muscatine, "Explanatory notes to *The Parlement of Foules*," *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987) notes to lines 176-82 and 310-64, pp. 997, 999-1001.

[46] In his only take on the fable genre, the *Nun's Priest's Tale*, Chaucer refers to one of the *Physiologi* (l. 3271-2). It is an often unacknowledged fact, and also one revealing something about Chaucer's use of source materials, that he does so ironically, see David Chamberlain, "Musical Signs and Symbols in Chaucer: Convention and Originality," *Signs and Symbols in Chaucer's Poetry*, edd. John P. Hermann and John J. Burke, Jr. (University, Ala.: U of Alabama Press, 1981) 68-9.

[47] There are also collections of proverbs and sentences ascribed to both Smil Flaška (*Proverbia Flasskonis*) and Chaucer (*Proverbes of Chaucer*).

are of compilatory character, and so contain material from older *auctores* who were deemed worthy to be preserved, such as Isidor of Seville or Pliny. As the compilers all worked in Latin, similar concepts of the natural world diffused throughout Europe, even if often through different works. Smil Flaška of Pardubice, the nephew of the first Prague archbishop, received a bachelor's title at Prague University and so must have been versed in Latin authors thoroughly.[48] The popularity of animal fables is well-attested in 14th century Bohemia[49] and, apart from French or German models,[50] Smil might also have found his inspiration in both Latin and Czech works of Bohemian provenance[51] such as Gregory of Uherský Brod's *Physiologiarius*[52], Old Czech *Aesop* (which in turn draws partly on *Anticlaudianus*, one of Chaucer's source texts)[53] and Bartholomeus Claretus' *Quadripartitus*, a large didactic collection of exemplary animal fables.[54] The treatment of animals in these types of works, whatever part of Latin Europe they originate in, is always "infused with the social and cultural preoccupations of its time"[55]: authors are not preoccupied with the properties of the members of natural world as such, but with those properties which can bear moral or symbolical significations.

1.1. Getting the Reader Ready

In Chaucer's poem, the medieval custom to construe the natural world as a web of cultural or social *indicia* to be decoded by the human mind becomes apparent at the moment the narrator enters the allegorical garden in his dream vision. What he first remarks, "glad and wel begoon", are the "trees clad with leves […] of colour fresh and greene / As emeraude, that joye was to seene." (171, 173-5). When describing them in a catalogue, however, he curiously does not refer to their natural properties which arguably caught his senses, but to their import to human society: "the byldere ok", "the boxtre pipere", "the saylynge fir", "the olyve of pes", "the dronke vyne", "the victor palm" etc. (176-82). The trees are defined by their use, what they are *good for* – what is

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48 For Latin works taught at Prague University, see Josef Tříška, *Literární činnost předhusitské univerzity* (Praha: Univerzita Karlova, 1967) 162.

49 Thomas, *Anne's Bohemia* 127.

50 Cf. Čapek, "Vznik a funkce" 78-85. Čapek gives an account of the various *dictz des oyseaux* or *Tierraten* that might and especially might not have been known to Smil.

51 Ibid. 193-7. For an extended list of similarities in animal *proprietates* and *moralitates* among Bohemian texts of the 14th century including *NC*, see Tříška, *Literární a myšlenkové* 86-106.

52 Jan B. Čapek, "Alegorie Nové rady a Theriobulie," *Věstník Královské české společnosti nauk, Třída pro filosofii, historii a filologii* 3/36 (1936) 16 and 21-3. Tříška, *Literární a myšlenkové* 101.

53 Čapek, "Alegorie" 25-6. Tříška, *Předhusitské bajky* 50-51.

54 Tříška, *Předhusitské bajky* 68.

55 Dorothy Yamamoto, *The Boundaries of the Human in Medieval English Literature*, (Oxford: OUP, 2000) 24.

made out of them or what their cultural significance is, Chaucer suggesting "to his readers that all representations of nature in the vision that follows will be carried out with human needs and projects in mind"[56].

A similar 'acculturation' of the natural happens also with the catalogue of birds preceding the *parlement* itself (330-64). There, most of the birds are supplied with qualifiers, appositional or adjectival, which render them as signifiers of human characterisitcs; thus we have for instance "the jelous swan", "the thef, the chough", "the janglynge pie", "the false lapwynge, ful of trecherye", "the coward kyte", "the wedded turtil, with hire herte trewe", "the hote cormeraunt of glotenye" or "the raven wys". Some others are defined not as a metaphor of human qualities but according to their significance to man's activities, such as "the kok, that orloge is of thorpes lyte" or "the oule ek, that of deth the bode bryngeth". Again, the bird catalogue serves to provide the reader with an incentive to interpret "nonhuman nature in terms of distinctly human categories".[57] Most of the characteristics can be traced back to the above-mentioned encyclopedias and to Alan of Lille, but their inclusion in this form is indeed symptomatic – since literary catalogues need not have been always filled with the same kind of human-related characteristics,[58] Chaucer here clearly has the intention to make the reader realize he is stepping outside the non-allegorical narrative into the allegory itself. The reader is, in other words, instructed that what ever he is presented with from this point onwards, the contents of the dream vision, needs to be interpreted as allegory.

Unlike Chaucer, whose cue as to how the major part of his poem should be read is woven into a literary commonplace, and hence at first sight inconspicuous, Smil "leaves allegorical shelters briskly and unscrupulously".[59] After we are introduced to the setting of *NC* as a council consisting of the retinues of the Lion and the Eagle, Smil intrudes with an authorial defence of his method:

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[56] Kiser 47.

[57] Ibid. 48.

[58] Cf. for instance Maidstone's contemporary *Concordia*, 361-8, where the trees and beasts are basically only enumerated, or Lydgate's later *A Complaynte of a Lovers Lyfe*, 65-73, which is largely descriptive of the trees' visible properties. For a treatment of the rhetorical device of tree catalogues as a commonplace in medieval literature, see Ernst R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (NJ: Princeton UP, 1990) 194-5.

[59] Čapek, "Alegorie" 14.

Perhaps someone would like to ask,
saying: "What kind of tale is that?
I think it is not the truth,
nor will any wise man believe
that among birds and beasts,
while the world standeth, there would occur
such an assembly.
Unless he has a design,
wanting to mislead us cunningly
and tell us fables as truth:
we know that beasts do not understand,
nor can they speak at all;
whoever composed this tale,
why, he is not governed by reason,
perhaps he thinks us children."

I let you know,
whoever thinks that,
know that it is not a wise thing
to ask who is telling it
but what he tells, that is to be cared about,
to understand if it is good
[and] be able to avoid the bad.
Whoever it is [the teller], do not care about
that,
if it is true, accept it
and do not meddle any more in [my] work –
Now I am returning to my tale
where the lion orders the eagle
to advise […]
(56-82)

Smil acts as an authoritative author for whom the message means everything – he openly admits his didactic purpose, cleverly tackling all those who would accuse him of trying only to entertain his audience as if they were "children". At the same time, he discloses the poem *shall* indeed be entertaining when he confirms the lighter genre of animal fable as a means to convey his message. The need for a precautionary vindication may originate in Smil's recognition of the innovative approach he has taken in combining the more diverting form of an animal tale with the serious purpose of a *speculum principis* – his predecessors and contemporaries chose forms much more profound and grave, which were probably deemed more worthy of the eminent topic of statecraft.[60]

The prefatory insertion prefigures Smil's conscious comments, scarce and short but traceable throughout the text, on how the different counsels should be received. These comments are usually inserted into the introductory line or two (which precede most

[60] The customary mode was an "abstract treatise on kingship" (J. H. Burns, ed., *The Cambridge History of Medieval Political Thought, c. 350 – c. 1450* (Cambridge: CUP, 1988) 56) in dialectical form, for instance John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* or *De Regno* attributed to Thomas Aquinas. Smil's contemporary Michael of Prague wrote his 1387 *De Regimine Principum* dressed as a dialogue between himself and the addressed Rupert III, Count Palatine, the eventual successor of Wenceslas IV. as the ruler of the Empire.

of the counsels) and always express the attitude of the narrator, his own evaluation of the speech: the Cock and the Weasel both speak "full wisely" (907, 1664), the Camel's utterance is also characterised as "very wise" (1724) and the Starling speaks "in reasonable words" (1457); the Unicorn speaks "clearly"(1871) and the Lark "clearly and mirthfully" (1573). The narrator sees to it that his reader is certain that these counsels are to be understood as the "true", "good" and "wise thing" he speaks about in the beginning (78, 75, 72). Other than the preliminary vindication, the only occasion on which the author actually intrudes into the action, however, remains the counsel of the Swine who advises towards uncleanliness, fornication and shamelesness (1120-32). The narrator concludes it: "So spoke the cursed swine / her words ever brazen. / It would be execrable to hear more / and so I want to stay silent about her." (1133-6). The narrator's categorical refutation to even tell more of the advice – which we infer he could – functions also as a reminder to the reader that while the verse may be humorous, in the afterthought he must always reflect back on what meaning it conveys for humans as ethical beings, and for him specifically.

Direct authorial assertions make up only a minor portion of hints at the correct view upon the counsels – the rest ensues from the content of some of the speeches themselves and from the characterisation of the speakers. Already the second speaker, the Leopard, advises the king on how to choose councillors wisely and not to listen to evil councillors nor to act on bad counsels (442-494). This looks inconspicuous at this early point – the Leopard's speech refers, among other things, to a hypothetical situation of receiving ill-meant advice. As the reader reads on, however, it turns out that there are bad counsels present also in the *consilium* he is reading at the moment.[61] The situation sketched by the Leopard exits the area of hypothesis: the text including a counsel against accepting ill counsels later includes also counsels that are apparently ill-meant – only after realizing that does the at first innocent advice appear quite cleverly self-reflexive. The Leopard's speech can thus be read as a meta-counsel, an introduction, for the reader as much as for the Lion, into the dangers of the council proper, a reinstatement of Smil's original caution to stay at guard and evaluate each counsel one is given.

[61] Such as that of the Swine mentioned above, the Ape (1551-72), the Goose (977-994), the Vulture, the Wolf or the Fox. More on the latter three in chapters 1.2., 1.4., 1.5. and 2.3.

1.2. *Proprietas* and *Moralitas*

> Listen, my king and lord,
>
> each one advises what he himself does,
>
> I do not blame them for it,
>
> they speak according to their nature.
>
> My counsel here is no different.
>
> (580-5)

In thus introducing his speech, the Bear in *NC* makes a very clear statement of the author's allegorical method as described earlier, i.e. that the animals all advise according to their *proprietates*. Just like the Leopard, the Bear speaks very early in the poem,[62] drawing attention to the literary device so that the reader can realize its use throughout the rest of the text. Taking into account what the Bear then actually advises to the king – to wallow in self-indulgence, act violently and bully others –, his preface sounds as a humorously failing attempt at vindication: 'I do not blame others for their natural property and therefore do not blame me for mine (for it is not my fault that I am going to advise wickedly)'; the exculpation is ironical and in the design of the text, it should alert the reader. The Bear is the first of the above-mentioned 'ill councillors' (of whom the Leopard had warned) and from his maw, the otherwise simple and perhaps even pedantic reference to the construction principle gains real significance for the reader – from now on, he shall be able to see that the animals associated with negative moral values will, accordingly, be giving ill counsel, which needs to be understood ironically.

Many counsels in *NC* are prefaced by a simple disposition of the moral value which the animal is to represent symbolically, by a simple positive or negative characteristic. Thus, for instance, “Humbly, softly, the lamb / advised the king against pride” (1213-4) or “The hare after his character timidly / also stood in the congregation” (1175-6) – the lamb then does advise to humility and self-sacrifice and the hare to seek reclusion from the society. When introducing some animals, Smil pronounces the *moralitas* to be drawn from their following advice; some others first refer to the *proprietas* and only then link the moral to it. The Lynx introduces himself: “The lynx

[62] The Bear is the fourth to give advice, after the Eagle, the Leopard and the Falcon.

have one habit / to walk always in a single trace – / they always abide by their own will" (1483-5). The beast itself refers to its own purported natural faculty and then supplies it with allegorical meaning, in anticipation of its subsequnt advice to use one's willpower to always strive towards the three religious virtues and towards God (1509-18).[63]

The Wolf opens with "Where it is possible, do not suffer hunger", a reference to his propensity to voracity observed from nature, supporting it with two lines on how others can "make running leaps", but the king should "load both his flanks", the Wolf thereby revealing in himself the moral category of gluttony (702-4). Due to his hunger, covetousness or gluttony, the wolf often ends up badly in fables, even to the point of death.[64] Smil's Wolf, however, does not seem to be aware of what actually happens to him in such tales, claiming the contrary effect of gluttonous manners: "That is very healthy for you / since I judge from my own experience, / from satiety comes sprightliness." (705-7); it is evident that Smil supposed his audience to know the fables, and that the Wolf speaks in fine dramatic irony comparable to that of the Bear. In his short introduction, the Wolf's unwittingly undermines his counsel, even before it really commences, as corrupt.

Both Chaucer and Smil prepare their audiences for their animal allegories and ensure they are read and understood properly in terms of human morals. Smil is definitely more explicit in his guidance of the reader, which is logical, considering the didactic type of text he writes. The development of Chaucer's text is much more enigmatic and the kind of direct involvement with the reader Smil adopts is foreign to him, but both of them share reflexivity of the meta-elements of the form they use, the animal allegory, and both exhibit this in their texts.

1.3. Stage Business

The means of allegory is, as we have said, the ascription of a human internal, moral characteristic to an animal, the pathetic fallacy at which Chaucer's listing of birds hints. It is true that Smil does "hardly ever exercise description […], the animals portraying themselves through their allocutions"[65], but when, albeit infrequently, stage

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[63] When mentioning the Lynx and the Lamb, it seems pertinent to mention in passing that one of the important sources for Smil's choices of some of the animals and their symbolic meanings is Biblical exegesis and mystical tradition which also gives the poem one of its frames in the counsels of the Eagle and the Swan. More on this in chapters 3.3.-3.6.

[64] See Dunn and Byrnes in note 44.

[65] Čapek, "Alegorie" 27.

business is used, it can further the moral meaning, the actions mirroring the respective properties in the same way the comments and speeches do. The Crane, for instance, advises always to keep silent and instead of talking to listen and act, and his introductory action reflects that: "Having kept silent [for a moment], the Crane spoke:" (602). In *PF*, the turtle-dove "wex for shame al reed" (583) at the thought of the changing of lovers, thus displaying physically a human emotion congruent with the significance of the turtle-dove as "the ultimate symbol of chastity, monogamy, and fidelity".[66]

The physical actions, however, have also one other effect besides signalling the symbolical meaning of the allegorical animal, that of bringing about also the *bodily* aspect of humanization of animals – turtle-doves do not blush in real world, it is people who do. In *NC*, "king Lion beckoned his hand"(33) and the Eagle had "ridden out of his house" (117); here, Smil comes with the identical concept as Chaucer does, the *antropomorphism* of the animals in the etymological sense of the word, i.e. giving the animals human physique, human limbs or human means of movement (think of the absurdity of an eagle mounting a horse).[67] This is very different from Aesopian fables, where the only things in which the animals mirror people are moral and mental capacities (the latter occasioning the speech capacity), but the physical attributes of the animals are kept because they enable the stories to function.[68]

It must be said that Chaucer's use of antropomorphising signs, though quite sparse, can be much subtler than Smil's blunt revelations. At one point, Benson notes, that "[p]erformed by birds […], the stylized gestures of love's formality also have a comic dimension".[69] The first eagle speaks "With hed enclyned", which first looks as a natural movement of the bird's head but when it is complemented with "and with ful humble chere" (414), it can be more readily interpreted as an expression of courtliness, a notion confirmed by the ensuing blush of the addressed female eagle, which is depicted in a decidedly *fin'amors* fashion (442-45). Again, the confluence of the zoomorphic with the anthropomorphic ingeniously exposes the tension inherent in animal allegory,

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[66] Mary Allyson Armistead, *The Middle English Physiologus: A Critical Translation and Commentary*, MA thesis (Blacksburg, VA: Virginia Polytechnic Institute and University, 2001) 104.

[67] More on the physical actions of the animals as allegorical status symbols, see chapters 1.5. and especially 2.1.

[68] Think for instance of the *The Crane and the Wolf* where the crane with its long beak picks out a bone from the wolf's open maw lined intimidatingly with sharp fangs, which works precisely thanks to the bodily characteristics of the two participants.

[69] Benson, *Medieval Body Language* 38.

constantly reminding the reader that the animals must be understood as bearing human qualities.

The human capacity ascribed to allegorical animals most arbitrarily, the capacity of human tongue, is used for the same ends. In *PF*, "laughter aros of gentil foules alle" (575) while in *NC* "The fox, as is her custom, / laughed as a sycophant does, / shouting" (1379-81) – laughter was perceived as pertinent solely to humans, in the former example signifying derision, in the latter flattery. Chaucer, however, makes the capacity for speech assigned to his birds work also backwards, making the reader realize that what he is reading is only a fantasy, a vision: "The goos, the cokkow, and the doke also / So cryede, "Kek, kek! kokkow! quek, quek!" hye," (498-9). After being elaborately persuaded to read the birds allegorically in human categories, the reader is set back into perceiving them as parts of nonhuman nature. Chaucer amuses his audience with this sudden interjection but also prepares it, with the help of the *natural* gibberish, to read the counsels of the lesser birds as claptrap in *human* terms, thus in a sense creating the effect of alienation.

1.4. Categorisation into Species

Speaking of the 'lesser birds' in *PF*, we should note how animals in both poems undergo social coding. A premise for this process is that every member of the *parlement* is understood as a member of their 'natural class', i.e. as a representative of a whole species, which point is made explicit in *NC*: "One dog was there also / that spoke the words of all dogs" (1335-6). In *PF*, the stress on natural classification according to species is enormous, the narrator setting out the catalogued trees "Ech in his kynde" (174) and remarking how there were birds of "every kynde" (311, 365). When the four groups of birds to actually speak in the parliament are introduced (323-329), they are classified at the same time according to their habitat, feeding habits and flocking habit, the taxonomical criteria of late medieval science being conflated into super-categories.[70]

In *NC*, some of the animals do also represent a broader taxonomical group, based on habits or appearance: when the Crow finishes, other comparable birds, "the raven, / the magpie, the sparrow, the bunting", are said to approve of it (1210-2); the Fox speaks

[70] Olson 262-3: "The scheme which Chaucer presents is a schematization of the scheme of that professional scheme-maker, Bartholomeus Anglicus", in whose *Speculum* "everything is classification, […] by anatomy, by surface physical characteristics, by habitat, by feeding characteristics, by social nature."

also for the marten and the otter (1411-2); the Owl represents also other night-birds (1377).[71] The animals in both texts realize fully their affiliation to their species; in *NC*, apart from the Lynx quoted above, the Wolf and the Fox also use the inclusive plural forms (732, 1402) and the Ass begins his speech with "neither I nor my uncles [i.e. elder relatives]" (998). In *PF*, the different classes choose their representative speakers, who are ready to represent the interests of the whole species, the goose, for instance, opening its parliamentary address with the proclamation of speaking "For water-foul" (504), the cuckoo seconding with "And I for worm-foul" (505).[72]

The natural properties of the animals or the symbolical values associated with them are used as denominators of social standing in a contemporary human society, a species assuming the role of a societal class. The first symbolical means of allegorical allusion used in both poems is heraldry, which can point only towards the highest strata of society. In *PF*, the female eagle could refer to Anne of Bohemia and her imperial descent.[73] In *NC*, at least two figures, the Lion and the Eagle, need to be viewed from the heraldic point of view.[74] The lion has always been seen as representing the King of Bohemia, while a number of lands which pertained to the lands of the Czech Crown,[75] including Silesia, Austria and Czieszyn[76], had their coats of arms charged with an eagle – with the most widely accepted interpretation understanding the Eagle as the Margrave of Moravia, the land most closely tied to Bohemia.[77] Heraldry thus gives grounds to the Lion sending for "his earls and lords / beasts large and small" (4-5) and generally being addressed as a young, recently acceded king, and for the Eagle to be described as his equal;[78] inclusion of other concrete persons in the heraldic project is at best dubious.[79]

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[71] Other instances include the Kite who represents also the buzzard (1413) or the Nightingale who gets approval from the linnet, another songbird, and other "small birds" (1720-2). More on the latter in chapters 3.1. and 3.2.

[72] More on the parliamentary speakers in *PF* in 1.5. and 2.2.-2.4.

[73] See chapter "Dating" in the Introduction.

[74] Jan Skutil, "Heraldické alegorie skladby Orel a král i Nové rady Smila Flašky z Pardubic a z Rychemburka," *Sborník příspěvků ze IV. Setkání genealogů a heraldiků*. (Ostrava, 1992) 113-7.

[75] As in *NC*: "For then the eagle's dominion / belonged to the power of king lion, / in those times when this occurred." (14-16).

[76] Čapek, "Alegorie" 29-30.

[77] Alfred Thomas' speculation that in the reception of the first redaction of *NC*, the Eagle might have been interpreted as representing the imperial duties seems quite unlikely. Cf. Thomas, *Anne's Bohemia* 129.

[78] More on the portrayal of kingship in the Lion in the next chapter.

[79] Čapek, "Alegorie" 31-2.

1.5. Species as Estates

Representing the avian or the animal world in comprehensive categorisation, the texts, as allegories of social class, show human society from its highest strata down to the lowest. Most of the allegory of estates permeating *NC* and *PF* lies in the values represented by the animals. In *NC*, the nobility is arguably represented by the Leopard, the Lynx, the Hart, the Peacock and the Horse (and perhaps also the Falcon). In *PF*, the role of the ruling class pertains to the eagles specifically and that of the nobility to the other "foules of ravyne" represented by the male falcon (527-9). The eagle is described by Nature, in terms of ideal values of the nobility, as "wyse and worthi, secre, trewe as stel" (395). The Leopard expresses a similar preference in the king's council, saying that the "wise king" can "recognise a lord by his counsel", and argues for "high-born lords / who are well known in honour, / […] / I advise you to consult them. / I tell you out of pure faithfulness" (491-5).[80]

The Lynx advises as to how to wage wars and in that, he represents nobility as the 'warrior class', and Chaucer's falcon mirrors him in that: "I can not se that arguments avayle: / Thanne semeth it there moste be batayle", all the eagle suitors responding "Al redy!" to guard their knightly honour (538-40). The Hart in *NC* advocates peace of the land which leads to prosperity and also advises the king to follow his wise predecessors – taking in account his statement that "Whoever attains honourable station / is a fool if he loses it," (815-6), we can assume he represents the landed classes, who acquired their titles through economic activity (rather than the very traditional nobility heralded by the Leopard, who were connected to the offices of state and the king's retinue).

The Peacock, a symbol of good looks and also vanity, pronounces advice partly on the appropriateness of expensive vestments and of displaying splendour (838-52). The Horse, first in with the Peacock (862-4), speaks "freely" (861), a qualifier indicative of chivalrous ambitions of the nobles who valued their 'freedom' or 'liberality', his station confirmed by the courtly sport of jousting (in which the animal itself partook), his description of which is rather ridiculous.[81] These two represent the nobility not as an economic and political force or as preservers of values and traditions but as a class thirsty for divertissement and dependent on the pomp of status symbols; together they form the allegorical image of courtiership. In that light, it is also notable how frequently

[80] For more on Leopard as a member of nobility, see chapter 2.2.

[81] For the general contempt for jousting as foreign and frivolous in Bohemian authors of the 14th century, see Thomas, *Anne's Bohemia* 129-31.

the Peacock and the Horse use the word "heart", the Horse even advising to "invite beautiful maidens and ladies [to the jousts] / to let your heart revel in it" (867-8) – a moment in which we get a glimpse of the courtly passion expressed in the eagles' wooing speeches in *PF*. The language there is that of a strained hyperbole of emotion, the first eagle exclaiming "For in myn herte is korven every veyne" (425), the third repeating that it "wel happen may" (473) that he shall "for sorwe deye" (471) and "deye to-day" (469).

In *PF*, value divides between the various societal groups are defined by their discrepant attitudes towards the love-question of what should happen if one noble lady has three suitors to choose from. In their pursuit, the eagles themselves cling to the belief in the givens of *fin'amors* – the knight's unconditional, self-destructive fidelity to the 'merciless' female. In this, they are supported by the aristocratic birds of prey who, as noted above, uphold ideals similar to those of the Leopard and the Hart: they would like the female eagle to choose "the worthieste / of knyghthod, and lengest had used it, / Most of estat, of blod the gentilleste" (548-50).

The water-foul, the duck and the goose, propose that those who are not loved must find somebody else to procreate with (566-7). As they cannot rely on their descent or traditional authority, they need to assert that their "wit is sharpe" (565) – to support their position, they take recourse to a series of rather nonsensical and distasteful proverbial truisms in the end, a parody, on Chaucer's part, of the argumentative use of *sententiae*. Charged with comparative "simpletonism, a symbolism easy enough for a court poet to extend to the less lettered commons"[82], they put stress on practical "resoun" (564, 591) and "love no taryinge" (565), thus proving to be practical-minded burghers.[83]

In Bohemia, the commoners as a class were politically under-represented (their hour of glory to come in the next century) and so it could be the Ass who champions their cause, claiming that his kind is never invited to the councils of the nobles (997-1000) and

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[82] Olson 277. Olson also notes Lydgate's later *The Horse, the Goose and the Sheep* where the goose explicitly becomes an allegory of the commons.

[83] See Craig E. Bertolet, ""My Wit Is Sharp; I Love No Taryinge": Urban Poetry and the "Parlement of Foules," *Studies in Philology* 93.4 (1996): 365-89. See esp. pp. 369-73, where he defines the values of the emergent bourgeoisie: education, practicality and time management. He alludes, among others, to Le Goff's concept of "merchant time" as opposed to Frandenburg's "aristocratic leisure, *otium* – surplus time, a form of wealth" associated with courtly love idiom (in which the noble birds partake). The strife in *PF* ensues from the lesser birds' abhorrence at the fact that the three eagles' wordy wooing speeches took up one whole day (489f.).

advocating the virtue of industry even for rulers and lords temporal and spiritual (1015-6), expressing the opinion that "without work, goods and honour cannot be" (1020) and warning of indulgence in easy life (1024-6). The other representative of the low-born is the Fox who, a personification of their noxious ambition, antagonizes "the earls, the powerful lords" (1391) as exerting too much authority over the king and reprimanding him for his excesses. The only hope for those of lower social status to gain political power was to obtain it directly from the king. The Fox thus flatters the Lion, telling him he is just perfect and needs no counsel or external control (1382-1401): "And for that, you have enough of *us smaller ones*, / who, even if they find out something [bad] about you / will not tell you in the face." (1402-4).

The turtle-dove in *PF* invokes God and refuses the goose's proposition of marriage as a practical contract, understanding the pleas for love as eternal vows of fidelity which, if not accepted, convert into a vow of chastity; she is clearly the representative of lords spiritual. In *NC*, it is the Leopard who requires respect towards the prelates, but he certainly represents nobility. It could easily be again the Turtle-dove who stands in for the clergy as she exhorts for "purity" and conditions salvation by the need to dwell in one of the "three states, […] marriage, widowhood or chastity" (1153f.).[84] As for the last speaker in *PF*, the cuckoo, because the participants of the wooing process cannot find a solution, proposes to leave all four of them single for the rest of their lives; in that non-solution, she may represent the "selfish curial officials" who, as bureaucrats, were "concerned that the business get done", pursuing "efficiency in their jobs".[85] Olson further argues that the branding of the cuckoo as "glotoun" (610, 613) and usurper corresponds with the public image of members of the state apparatus.[86] Gluttony and usurpation as the main attributes of the king's officials resemble closely their portrayal in *NC*, where they are represented by the Vulture and the Wolf.

The Wolf was thought by critics to allegorise a grabbing friar on the grounds of his self-description: "And how many we are, all grey, / we stare wildly out of our hoods." (731-2). Čapek has, however, successfully shown that the case is different – such vestments are known to have been worn by the king's judges.[87] This observation

[84] Tříška suggests the Eagle, who illuminates the theology of worldly power in *NC*, as a representative of the high clergy, but the heraldic and 'occasional' reading technically negate this possibility. Cf. Tříška *Předhusitské bajky* 90.

[85] Olson 264-5.

[86] Ibid. 277.

[87] With no manuscript evidence, Thomas' claim that in a supposed preceding redaction, the Wolf was indeed intended to represent a monk is highly tenuous. Cf. Thomas, *Anne's Bohemia* 131.

corresponds well with the way the Wolf describes how the courts work and how he can single-handedly overturn their results into the king's, and so to his own economic advantage (708-29). The king's officers wielded the king's supreme authority, and so their rulings were incorrigible and their powers formidable: “Whoever we swarm about, / he shall be forsaken by God / once we lay our hands on him.” (734-6) The Vulture's preferred office is, in conformity with his natural predisposition for 'taking care' of the dead, that of escheator: “With that, king, please do not tarry / and ask for escheats, / who and where has died in which house. / I am well predisposed for that.” (747-50).[88]

1.6. To Conclude

Up until now, we have focussed on how the authors relate the natural world to the reader, on the ways in which they construe it into allegories reflecting the human world. Having finally established that in both *PF* and *NC* the birds and beasts, representing a variety of human values, figure as diverse components in a carefully constructed image of the 14th century society, we can now look at how the society is governed in the two texts and how it functions internally, as a community. The latter two animals defined as corrupt officials exemplify Smil's lively interest in the issues of practical administration of the state, a concern Chaucer shares with him, and one which shall therefore interest us in the next chapter. Both Smil and Chaucer seem to have a talent for depicting communal affairs (as they know them well from experience) and a clear idea of what their ideal state should be.

[88] In the rest of his counsel, the Vulture explains the whole business of escheating and custody over orphans in considerable detail. More on this in chapter 2.3.

2. The Parliament and the Monarch

Right at the beginning of *NC*, the reader is informed that the king convoked the council "once upon a time", calling in nobles from all his lands and explaining to them the specific reason he did so – to receive counsel on kingship, as he is a "young king" soon after accession. In that, we see that the "council" is not any sort of Privy Council, not a small and regular body of courtly politics. It is an assembly, an occasional congregation intended to advice on a single, though momentous matter. The assembly is really a medieval 'parliament', the political representation of the realm assembled for a common, communal purpose: "Do advise, everyone standing here, / towards order, towards peace of the land" (49-50). In *PF*, the assembly also comprises the entire political representation of Nature's realm (in the form of birds), its entirety demonstrated by the exhaustive enumeration of all the bird species present; the aim is also peace and order in the realm, to be ensured by a yearly assembly (on Valentine's Day[89]) where the birds choose their mating partners (309-10, 369-71).[90] The situation is thus fully comparable, and we shall observe how the two poets use parliamentary givens – the monarch, the language, the proceedings – to convey their message.

2.1. Monarchical Figure

Textual evidence attests that Nature in *PF* is construed as the monarch figure in much the same way as the Lion is in *NC*. The titles of address are matching, Nature in the words of the narrator a "quene" and in those of the formel eagle the "almighty quene", while the Lion is consistently addressed as the "king" or "dear king".[91] The

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[89] This could either be February 14th or May 3nd. For the latter possibility, see Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Chaucer and the Cult of St. Valentine* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), for the former, see Jack B. Oruch, "St. Valentine, Chaucer, and Spring in February," *Speculum* 56.3 (1981): 534-565.

[90] It is of chief interest that there was a heightened concern for the parliament to be held annually. In the last parliament of Edward III in 1376 and the first of Richard II in 1377, the commons petitioned for the statutes of 1330 and 1362 to be put into practice. Those statutes, though never observed, guaranteed yearly convocation of the parliament as a measure to maintain justice and repair wrongs. See A. L. Brown, "Parliament, c. 1377-1422," *The English Parliament in the Middle Ages*, edd. R. G. Davies and J.H. Denton (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania Press, 1981) 110-1, and J. G. Edwards, "'Justice' in Early English Parliaments," *Historical Studies of the English Parliament I*, edd. E. B. Fryde and Edward Miller *(*Cambridge: CUP, 1970.) 291-6.

[91] For the purpose of comparison of Nature and the Lion as representatives of royalty as a societal class, gender issues make little difference. In portraying Nature as a female figure with ensuing social roles, Chaucer is hardly trying to be very original, as he consciously follows a literary tradition stretching back to late antiquity. See George Economou, *The Goddess Natura in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, MA: HUP, 1972). For a feminist reading of Nature as an empowering female figure, see Jean E. Jost, "Chaucer's Parlement of Foules as a Valentine Fable, the Subversive Poetics of Feminine Desire," *In Parentheses: Papers in Medieval Studies* 1 (1999): 65-7. For a strenuous psychoanalytical reading of Nature based on an interpretation of her as a supreme mother figure, see Krier.

societal role and conduct of the king is the crucial topic of the whole of *NC* as a mirror for princes, but the way in which Nature is represented in the action of *PF* suggests a very similar concern there. In his catalogue of birds, Chaucer places first those highest in social hierarchy, the birds of prey, and among these "The gentil faucoun, that with his feet distreyneth / The kinges hond" (337-8). The "faucon-gentil" was a special term for birds proper for royal hawking, usually the female peregrine falcon,[92] although medieval terminology concerned with the birds' "special qualifications for falconry" could use the same names for what modern taxonomy recognizes as different species.[93] The 'gentil' hawking bird on the wrist was the reminder of the royal hunting prerogative and a status symbol.

"But to the point –," transitions the narrator from the bird enumeration into the parliamentary scene, "Nature held on hir honde / A formel egle, of shap the gentileste / That ever she among hir werkes fonde,"(372-4). The eagle was always set the highest among fowls (accordingly, it opens Chaucer's catalogue); in *Boke of St. Albans*, a derivative late 15th century manual on heraldry, hunting and hawking of dubious practical authority but of interest as for the ideology associated with falconry, the eagle precedes all the other hawks as one pertinent only to an emperor, only behind him are the gyrfalcon (for a king) and "facon jentyll" (for a prince).[94] The eagle was scarcely used for hawking in real life, its weight and size disqualifying it, but its cultural significance as the supreme regal and imperial bird was enormous.[95] One of the titles the narrator gives Nature in *PF* is indeed "noble emperesse" (319) and, though first customarily referred to as a "goddesse", she is construed at first sight, by means of symbolism, as a royal presence.

Nature is thus symbolically put into the role of an earthly monarch in the stanza where she is introduced, and the honorific she receives in the opening of the next confirms this: "Nature, the vicaire of the almighty lorde," (379). The 'vicar of God' is the designation of a ruler as the God's representative on earth, a term descriptive of the nature

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92 MED has "faucon: 1. (a) The peregrine falcon, esp. the female of the species as used in falconry; also, any of various other hawks so used; (b) gentil faucoun, ~ gent(il, the peregrine falcon."

93 See Casey A. Wood and F. Marjorie Fyfe, *The Art of Falconry by Frederick II of Hohenstaufen* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1943) 526: "The old names of rapacious birds used in falconry are extremely confusing and often difficult to identify, because several supposed 'good' varieties of falcons were often birds of the same species."

94 Juliana Berners, *The book containing the treatises of hawking, hunting, coat-armour, fishing, and blasing of arms*, ed. Joseph Haslewood (London: White and Cochrane, Triphook, 1801) 25.

95 For the heraldic reading, see "Dating" in the Introduction and chapter 1.4.

of the king or queen's office.[96] Chaucer borrowed the epithet itself along with the figure of goddess Nature from Alan of Lille, as he discloses (316-8). In the preceding poetic representations of Nature, by Alan or Jean de Meun, the epithet is used too and Nature is also represented as a ruling figure, but Chaucer further utilises this convention – he portrays a situation which would befit a real-world ruler and maps the legal and political aspects of it. Nature is not only said to be a monarch or represented so in symbolical terms, she actually *acts* as one. The interest for us lies in the fact that in his kingly position, the Lion in *NC* is portrayed in both description (counsels reflecting the king's role in society) and action (participation in the parliament) as, ideally, taking part in the same type of legal and political practice – the terminology in both cases being that of real 14th century administration and practical politics.

The monarch always convoked his parliament and presided over it, his participatory role in its proceedings becoming that of the legitimising authority. In *NC*, the king does not take part in discussion, he does not ever step down from his dignified position, but only issues short, often non-verbal reactions, mostly commendations. Some critics have remarked that in *PF*, Nature gives the birds a lot of space, first the tercel eagles and then the lesser birds, only to witness them wreaking havoc before finally imposing a decision on them. While the *parlement* goes underway, Nature indeed does not intrude, which was an absolutely pertinent attitude for a 14th century English king. "If the king descended to the level of personal debate with a session of parliament, then he was no longer the judge dispensing justice from above the fray."[97] The role of the king as a judge was corrective, hearing pleas and solving problems, not meddling in others' affairs where there was no need for it – *nemo iudex sine actore*. In *NC*, before his advice on legal matters, the Crane admonishes the Lion:

> […] to others' talk.
> king, be ready to listen Do not be overhasty with words
> but not hasty to speak: so as not to get yourself caught in your
> speaking often does harm speech,
> […] since frequently the king's word
> Let others jabber, whoever wishes so, will be new a hundred years later:
> you yourself be quiet and pay attention it will come up in a tenth foreign country,

[96] For more on Nature's traditional duties, see chapter 3.5.

[97] Phil Bradford, "A silent presence: the English king in parliament in the fourteenth century," *Historical Research* 84 (2011): 210.

many will speak it in Rome. (605-
Talk little but do much, 628)
I faithfully advise you that.

In a figure of authority such as the king is, loquaciousness is evidently a sign of weakness as it never helps to achieve the aims but rather hinders them. The ideal king must always weigh his words well, says the Crane, if only for the fact that they shall outlive him – the king, representing an institution which shall survive him, does not bear responsibility only for his own deeds as a mortal being, but also for the posterity ensuing from those. Nature's detached stance in *PF* is also much easier to understand if we consider it an instance of *mimesis* of how a king should have and ideally would have behaved in the presence of his underlings – in order to keep authority, words needed to be dispensed cautiously: "The royal speech was a powerful instrument when used to hand down justice, as the king spoke not only for himself but for the dignity of his office as the realm's supreme judge."[98]

While protracted speaking could debase the king's supremacy, other means of communicating his opinion seem less inadvisable. Welcoming the Eagle, the Lion "with honor embosomed him", thus conferring his royal favour upon a person ofcomparable rank (his family relative, in the commonly accepted heraldic reading) and behaving in accordance with social codes and norms. In *PF*, the same gesture at once signals to a medieval audience the nobility of Scipio who, meeting Massinissa, "him for joye in armes hath inome" (38); in both texts, gestures function as social denotators.[99] The Lion suits his non-verbal expression to the occasion and audience: "When [the animals] had congregated / they knew not what the king orders. / Then the king lion *beckoned with his hand*, / wishing to tell them the reason / for which he bid them congregate." (31-5) Ameaningful, well-devised gesture can, unlike a dispensable speech, furnish the king with authority.[100] The king speaks at some length solely to his chiefest nobles, the Eagle and the Leopard who begin the council, and after line 699, there comes no more direct speech from him.

The only occasion appropriate for the Lion to intervene occurs during the Vulture's counsel. The Vulture forms a part of a thematic section on public administration

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98 Ibid.
99 Nature, holding the formel eagle, "often kissed her beak" (378), which, as a feminine gesture of noble affection, may also be interpreted as signifying of status.
100 Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Svět středověkých gest* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2004) 172-4.

and law courts consisting in the speeches of the Bear, the Crane, the Wolf, the Vulture and finally the Hart. The Bear and the Wolf both advise the king to rule unlawfully and tooppress his subjects and it is the Vulture, who concludes this unambiguously ironical thread of 'advice', that receives a chiding gesture from the king: “He would have babbled even more, / so the king beckoned that he should hold his tongue.” (775-6). Markedly, this is the sole negative comment the Lion issues in the course of *NC*,[101] since the king's disapproval is reserved only for apparent trespassers of the law.

Similarly, Nature remains in silence as long as the talks proceed but once peace and order of the assembly is breached, she exclaims to the lesser birds: “hold your tonges there!” She then sets out her role as a mediator of consensus among the community, still not an absolute ruler: “And I shal sone, I hope, a counseyl fynde / Yow to delyvere, and fro this noyse unbynde: / I juge, of every folk men shul oon calle / To seyn the verdit for yow foules alle.'” (521-525). These following counsels again relapse into a noisy flurry of quips among the different groups represented, and consequently, Nature has to step in with another exclamation to be able “to seyn the verdit”: “`Now pees,' quod Nature, `I comaunde here;” (617).

As good monarchs, Nature in *PF* as well as the Lion in *NC* first listen to their subjects and only then, if need be, intervene into the parliamentary debate. The responsibility of the king “in parliament was to dispense justice and address the grievances of his subjects. He was, after all, the ‘fount of justice’, and the royal verdicts in cases were theoretically the final word on the matter.”.[102] Accordingly, Nature's *ad hoc* intervention is not a whim of hers but an attempt to act beneficially from the position of authority once the community of her subjects cannot decide for itself.

2.2. Order and Degree

In *The General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales* Chaucer famously comments on the appropriate order in which the pilgrims should be presented according to their “station and degree”. This order is then no less famously torn apart as the Miller breaches into the hierarchy, disrespecting what had been instituted and toppling the whole delicate, monolithic system into a Bakhtinian carnival of polyglossia.[103] For the limited time of the

[101] Jan B. Čapek, “Die Ironie des Smil Flaška,” *Slavische Rundschau* 10 (1936): 75.
[102] Bradford 209.
[103] John M. Ganim, “Bakhtin, Chaucer, Carnival, Lent,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer Proceedings* 2 (1986): 59-71.

pilgrimage, the participants accept the toppling of conventions and listen to the others not by their "station and degree" but according to what each may have to say – what makes the *Tales* so carnivalesquely liberal is the principle 'free for all', the possibility for any character to react without the fear of punishment imposed from above.

In *CT*, it is significantly the *innkeeper*, a figure of spurious authority outside his pub, who seemingly fails to fulfil his role as the leader of the community, letting it lapse into disorder by a single drunken intrusion.[104] In *PF*, the situation is radically different: the leader is the monarch and the event is not encapsulated outside the regular functioning of the society; it is not a moment of relief from the constraints of order but, quite contrarily, the official occasion for reasserting them. While openness in *CT* may have beneficial effects for the community, decreasing tension by alleviating it in a confined time, space and number of participants, in *PF* the authority is responsible for "every foul" (310) and required to ensure the entire society's well-being "for yeer to yeere" (321 and 411), defending its "usaunce" (674), stability consisting in the observance of 'custom'.[105]

Besides the idea of regular repetition as such, the principal 'custom' which holds all others together is the social hierarchy; it is the duty of the authority who convokes the meeting, here the monarch (and Harry Bailly in *CT*), to set the order up in a manner perceptible for all participants. When describing the first action undertaken by Nature, Chaucer stresses all the above-mentioned responsibilities: Nature, "This noble emperesse, ful of grace, / Bad every foul to take his owne place, / As they were wont alwey fro yeer to yere" (319-21). One's "owne place" means basically the same as "station and degree" in *CT*, the place in social (and here also, ingeniously, natural) stratification but also the actual place to sit in the congregation. As in *CT*, in both *PF* and *NC* the primary indicator of the hierarchy is the sequence in which the congregants are introduced. In *PF*, the social standing is evoked as linear precedence in the narrative and at the same time, inside the narrative, made explicit in spatial terms: "That is to sey, the foules of ravyne / Were hyest set; and than the foules smale, / ... / And water-foul sat loweste in the dale; / But foul that liveth by seed sat on the grene" (320-328).[106] Both the reader and the birds themselves are made to understand the hierarchy from the outset.

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[104] For a discussion of Harry Bailly as a monarchical figure, see David R. Pichaske and Laura Sweetland, "Chaucer on the Medieval Monarchy: Harry Bailly in the *Canterbury Tales,*" *The Chaucer Review* 11 (1977): 179-200.

[105] Variants of this quote repeat at lines 23, 236 and 674. Insistence on the natural annual cycle and on custom and use pervade the poem, stressing repetition and continuity as crucial to peace and contentment in the society.

[106] For Chaucer's division of the birds into groups see chapters 1.4. and 1.5.

The Lion in *NC* lets speak first the Eagle, who "stood next to him" (52), and holds an extremely polite conversation with him. The spatial and dialogical context definitely denotes the Eagle as the king's near equal. "After that he said to the Leopard: "My faithful and always ready, / you are the first and foremost of my council"" (373-375). "The falcon, he stood the nearest" and so it "seemed pertinent" to the Lion that he should speak right after the Leopard (539-540). Spatial positioning defines the hierarchy: the king is at the centre, the only one he touches and talks to is his relative, and his closest and nearest, both metaphorically and literally, are his chiefest courtiers of noble rank.[107] The Leopard champions the cause of the close circle of native nobility:

> "Do avoid also that: broad land and narrow councils.
> let not there be many in the council; Do not invite foreigners into the council
> in multitude there is dissension, and do not put hopes into the base-born,
> no concord in intentions. to invite them into dutiful council
> A wise king has peace everywhere, does not befit your station;
>
> (481-90)

The higher aristocracy feared the broadening of the base from which councillors could be drawn – from the landed gentry through foreigners associated with the Luxembourg court down to mere upstart low-borns; the call for a "narrow council" of those "well bred in the land" (493) is very pragmatic in that it aims at ensuring the monopoly of the nobility in all parts of the judicial system.[108] Smil Flaška, a member of higher nobility, portrayed the ideal monarch as a preserver of its prerogatives. Although she cares to further the common good, Chaucer's Nature bears a similar preference for nobility, explaining that "he that most is worthy shal beginne" (392) and then only "after him, by order shul ye chese," (400). Thus, Nature lets the tercel eagle speak first, "the foul royal above yow in degree," (394) and in *NC* the Lion asks the Eagle to give the first

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[107] The significance of leopard as a noble animal is well known to English public; in Bohemian heraldry, it was originally the same animal as the lion. For the falcon, see chapter 2.1.

[108] Feodor F. Sigel, *Lectures on Slavonic Law: Being the Ilchester Lectures for the year 1900*. (1902. Reprinted Kitchener, ON: Batoche Books, 2001) 52. Sigel notes that the members of the high court "as we know, were also councillors of the state and even representatives of the interests of the country, as opposed to those of the king after the appearance on the throne of a foreign dynasty". The control of the high court by the aristocracy is defined in Ondřej of Dubá, *Práva zemská česká*, ed. and introd. by Dr. František Čáda (Praha: Česká akademie věd a umění, 1930) articles 2-9, pp. 116-122. More on this source, written by Smil's contemporary, in chapter 2.3.

counsel.[109] In both texts, chronological and spatial sequencing are the most marked outward signs of hierarchy and precedence.[110]

The social ordering of the speakers is based on hierarchical relationships, but the underlying communicative structure by which the characters themselves abide is that of a parliamentary session. Parliamentary debate in *NC* is evoked through the reactions of one speaker to another – in the opening of their speech, most speakers relate it to the previous one and then shift the argument forward.[111] "King, hold it true / that this counsel was faithful: / the lamb has advised rightly. / I am now going to speak on justice." (1251-4); the Stork here follows up on the Lamb and then clearly sets out his own topic.[112] The Horse eventually uses the preceding preceding speech as a logical springboard for his own counsel: "The peacock spoke pertinently / for it, king, suits you / to wear pure gold. / *Above that*, I tell you wholly" (862-5). The Swallow's advice is explicitly presented as a reaction to the Beaver's and becomes a very outspoken antithetical refutation in which the speaker refers back to specific words of his predecessor;[113] some animals, thus, react also negatively.[114]

In *PF*, the situation is very similar – the manner in which the different speakers react to one another and to one another's arguments sarcastically moreover being the high point of comicality in the poem. The goose sums up the gentle birds' pleas for love: "Al this nys not worth a flye!" (501). The turtle-dove silences the cuckoo who seized the opportunity to speak: "'Ye may abyde a whyle yet, parde!' / Seide the turtel, 'if hit be your wille / A wight may speke, him were as good be stille." (519-21) The goose, when putting

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[109] For the significance of the eagle see chapters 1.4. and 2.1.

[110] After all, the first impetus for the lower birds to dissent is the fashion in which the eagles abuse their prerogative and occupy excessive time for themsleves, finally spending the whole day in fruitless talk. See note 82.

[111] Čapek, "Alegorie" 13. Čapek explains: "It has been rightly noted that the utterances of all the king's counsellors appear rather as assembly speeches and that they often react to one another in the wise of parliamentary addresses; the counsels, not being confined to merely a brief allocution of one petition or another, do not follow one after another without internal linkage."

[112] A similar appraisal of the preceding counsel begins, for instance, the Griffin's speech (1851), the Squirrel's (1440), the Vulture's (746) or the Horse's (862).

[113] "[…] construct for yourself forts and castles / all out of wood and without stone, / do not care if the ground is not firm, / low in a valley and close to water. / Do not heed the harm / although it will perish and dissipate: / you will then build another. / *The swallow said to this:* / If you would like a firm-standing house, / I want to give my advice on that, / please do not build out of wood / or on mire by water, / if you wish to avoid harm, / but on good foundations, / having the advice of wise people / who can advise / and comprehend [what is needed] towards eternity. / Make hard basements for your self / if you want what is yours to last." (1644-62).

[114] Sometimes the speeches only follow the theme of the previous ones, not recalling any of them specifically: the Deer's exclamatory admonition, for instance, apparently retorts to the evil, disorder-provoking counsels of the Bear, Wolf and Vulture which immediately precede it: "King, do not prepare fight! Where you can, act towards peace,"(778-9).

forward her counsel, has to cry for silence to be heard: “Pes! Now tak kep every man / And herkneth which a resoun I shal forth brynge!” (563-4) The spear-hawk reacts, interestingly, by overturning his rhetorical opponent's own words into irony and against him: “Lo, here a *parfit resoun* of a goos!”, eventually amusing his compeers so much that a contemptuous “laughter aros of gentil foules alle”.[115] As much as Smil evokes debate proceedings at face value, though with some counsels outwardly ironical, Chaucer treats them in an ironical fashion to make his *PF* a parody of parliament.

2.3. Legal Matters

One of the immensely interesting points of comparison is the way in which the two poems handle legal affairs and public administration in their own jargon. Once the legalese of the time is recognized in the texts, it is much easier to see how entertaining they must have been to the contemporary audiences, even more so than to us. The juxtaposition of the obviously unreal dream image of talking animals against the manifestly real content of the words themselves strengthens the allegory's relation to its audience. In *NC*, the references to contemporary public affairs are more overt but in *PF*, however much it may be considered a poem on the theme of love, the issues of the day's political life are evoked no less vividly.

As the “chief clerk of the land” of Bohemia, Smil Flaška was charged with the management of the “land tables” or *registra regalia*, i.e. the land and property registry of the realm. His detailed empirical acquaintance with the workings of the legal and administrative branches of government is readily visible in *NC*, and the picture is certainly not a happy one.[116] As Wenceslas IV. failed to fulfil his role as a guarantor of just and peaceful legal proceedings, by 1394/5 it became the time to mouth his criticism for the frustrated Smil, whose family was harshly afflicted by the period of lawlessness. The Wolf along with the Vulture, the chief exponents of abuse of state institutions both advocate “confusion in the [land] tables” in order to take over property. The Wolf then explains how judicial system is to be made ineffective: “If they [the victims] want to sue / do not let them come before you. […] Guilty is he who is taken from, / it is him who deserves wrath / if he wants to sue for that.” (717-724) The Wolf argues for unlawful

[115] All in all, it is the noble birds who seem to be the most skilled at denigrating their opponents in debate: “Lo, swich it is to have a tonge loos! / Now parde, fol, yit were it bet for the / Han holde thy pes than shewed thy nycete. / It lyth nat in his wit, ne in his wille, / But soth is seyd, "a fol can not be stille."” (570-574).

[116] Čapek, “Vznik a funkce” 24-25.

seizure of property and the Vulture, agreeing with the Wolf in principle, adds a counsel on escheatment[117] which includes:

> If there are some orphans left,
> what else is confusion in [land] tables for?
> Not caring about the lords' court [high court],
> I will hold [the property] until their adulthood
> or hopefully even longer,
> with the help of my king
> I will manage the manor.
>
> (755-61)

The Vulture's 'management' would consist in selling the household out, burning forests and hoping that the orphans would die so that he could hold onto the land (762-774). Given the specificity of the legal malpractices mentioned in the counsels, it is absolutely incontestable that they constitute real grievances of Smil and his contemporaries. The relationship to real-world affairs is maintained through legal terms such as 'escheat', 'land tables', 'tenure' or the 'high court'.

One of Smil's contemporaries from the topmost administrative tier was the Highest Judge Ondřej (Andrew) of Dubá who, albeit on the king's side, criticized his governmental practice as much as the dissenting lords did. He is important to us in that he wrote the *Exposition of the Bohemian Law of the Country*, "the most brilliant legal document of this period",[118] and that just a couple of years after *The New Council* was composed. The lawbook is extremely useful for our purposes for its grounding in the practice of the high court, thus being primarily *descriptive* and not prescriptive.[119] In there, we find that land table errors must have occurred as they are treated in a separate article, with penalties for the clerk of the tables listed (in the graver cases up to the pain of death).[120] Many articles deal detailedly with the situation in which various claims are made without an entry in the tables, even with concrete examples of how these claims should be worded and treated with emphasis on witnesses – it is very easy to imagine how these cases, without written proofs, could have been manipulated.[121] There are,

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[117] See also chapter 1.5.
[118] Sigel 50.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ondřej of Dubá, art. 135, p. 174.
[121] See Ondřej, art. 29f., p. 134f.

of course, articles on *escheat*, *widows* and *orphans*,[122] detailing among others the lawful rights and duties of an orphan's custodian – in that light, the Vulture's intentions seem even more outrageous.[123] The lawbook was dedicated to Wenceslas IV. and its aim, to redress the state of affairs in Bohemia "for common good", is stated in the dedication itself.[124] The first few articles resemble some of the *NC* counsels so much, especially the Crane's, that it has been argued that the work was inspired by Smil's poem.[125]

Much more could be said on the topic, but the illustration of how legal language entered the poem is now, hopefully, lucid enough. These professionalisms would have readily been recognised by the more élite audiences, the landed classes for whom the land tables and law courts were means of securing their claims and status. In *PF*, Chaucer uses the language of political and legal proceedings to much the same effect: the image of the parliament does not stay in general, hazy terms but follows closely the one his English readers would have known. What C. S. Lewis once called "the unintentionally and unjustifiably prosaic verbiage of

> Foules of ravyne
> Han chosen first *by pleyn eleccioun*
> The tercelet of the faucon, *to diffyne*
> *Al hir sentence and as him list termyne*."[126]

is in fact a very nice example of how Chaucer evokes an environment (here the parliament) through the use of expert language pertinent to the area. In the context of the poem, 'election' is always used for 'a choice of a person (into a role)' (409, 621). The frequency of 'election' in Close Rolls of Richard II informs us that it was a technical term for choosing a person into an office, here into that of a speaker in parliament – the phrase 'by election' is present too.[127] The other words highlighted are used in the judicial

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[122] The Camel, in antithesis to the Vulture, advocates mercy towards widows and orphans and also judicial redress of wrongs done to them (1725-38).

[123] Ondřej of Dubá, art. 97-99, p. 159-61. Art. 98: "What powers does have a companion or custodian determined by the king for an orphan? None else than to ensure well before the office [court] that he does not spend [too much] from the orphan [i.e. from his inheritance] nor reduce their goods before their coming of age [etc.]"

[124] Ondřej of Dubá, art. 1, p. 115-6.

[125] František Čáda, "Introduction," *Práva zemská česká*. By Ondřej of Dubá. Ed. and introd. by Dr. František Čáda. (Praha: Česká akademie věd a umění, 1930) 11f. See also Čapek, "Alegorie" 16. Čapek notes that *NC* is explicitly cited in a late 15th century lawbook (by Viktorin Kornel z Všehrd); the description of (due and undue) legal proceedings apparently seemed vivid and well-devised even a hundred years later.

[126] Lewis, 165. Italics are Lewis'.

[127] *Calendar of the Close Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office, Richard II* (London, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1914). May 8 1383 at Westminster: "[…] Proviso that the said William and the others

context of *jugement d'amour*, for example in *House of Fame*.[128] The term 'conclusioun' (526, 620) which Nature uses in the same context means '(legal) judgement or decision' also in *The Knight's Tale*.[129]

Close Rolls yield similar results for terms such as 'governance', 'statute' or 'ordinance' (387-390), which all prove to be words indeed used in governmental orders as Nature uses them.[130] Lexically represented as a law-giver, she presides over the parliamentary factions whose course of action is described in terms of collective decision-making. The need for counsel from all the different groups in the parliament arises from what the lesser birds think a strictly legal problem: "Whan shal youre cursede *pletynge* have an ende? How sholde a *juge* eyther parti *leve*, / For ye or nay, *withouten any preve*?" (495-7). The problem is that of a judgement as in court, the judge deciding in favour of one of the parties present on the basis of proofs – in real life, if the lesser instances failed, the parliament indeed occasionally became a place of 'trial'.[131] As the goose then wants to come with "a remedie" in the form of its own judgement, Nature rectifies the lesser birds' assertiveness with the proposition that "of every folk men shul oon calle / To seyn the verdit for you foules alle" (524-5), effectively asking for the speakers of the estates to give counsel in parliament, as the custom was in difficult questions. The proposition requires endorsement from those congregated, even if only formally: "Assented were to this conclusioun / The briddes alle;" (526-7).

When choosing their speaker, the "foules of ravyne" duly follow the parliamentary officialese; as much as their language denotes them as lords temporal in the allegory, the actions and language of the lesser birds denote those as lower societal classes. The image that "The water-foules han her hedes leyd / Togeder" (554-5) is much more down-to-earth and less elevated than the "pleyn eleccioun" of the lords. After some gabbling, "They seyden sothly, al *by oon assent*, / How that the goos, with here facounde

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shall *by election* be put in any office in the city […]." All italics in this and the following notes are mine and intended for emphasis.

[128] *HF* 342-344: "Wayte upon *the conclusioun*, / And eek how that ye *determynen*, / And for the more part *diffynen*."; 707-710: "that can I preve / By resoun, worthy for to leve, / So that thou yeve thyn advertence / To understonde *my sentence*."

[129] *KT* 1743 and 1845.

[130] *Calendar of the Close Rolls*. Nov 12 1383: "[…] the king took upon himself *the governance of the realm* […]"; Nov 26 1381: "[…] and saving forfeitures contained in *the statute made in a parliament* holden at Westminster on the morrow of St. Edmund the Martyr […]"; 20 Dec 1383: … Order to cause proclamation to be Westminater. made of *an ordinance made by advice of the council* […]."

[131] Bradford 206f. See also Edwards 297: "Parliament was a 'high' court not merely because it was judicially above other courts, but also because it was in itself more than a judicial court: it was an omnicompetent organ of government at the summit of lay affairs in England."

gent, / "That so desyreth to pronounce *our nede*, / Shal telle *our tale*,"" (556-60). The collective aspect of decision-making is highlighted in "by oon assent" and the communal "our nede" and "our tale", the water-fowls' claim to their representative's "facounde gent" ('genteel eloquence') being nothing more than an attempt of the lesser birds to imitate the idiom of the higher-born.[132] All of the bird groups, though in fact fighting one another in the rhetorical battle, allude to the collectivity, to the 'commune' they partake in, and proclaim their particular solution in such manner so as to make it seem that it would serve to the advancement of the whole community.

2.4. Common Good

Similarly to how the Vulture or the Wolf in *NC* must be recognised as exponents of "personal or partisan gain"[133], Chaucer's birds always abuse the decorous claims for 'common good' only to come up with their own, selfish counsels based on their natural inclination.[134] The cuckoo wants "[of her] owne auctorite, / For comune spede, take the charge now" (507-8). Thus, she exploits the discourse of 'common good' in an attempt to bypass the principle of collective decision-making – and Nature rightly asserts her authority to prevent that. A similar type of abuse is exposed in *NC* in the Bear's counsel when he first advises the king to behave without regard for his subject's needs and to "have in everything his own will", then persuading him that the vital issue is not the state of affairs as it is felt by others but only endorsement on the surface: "Let yours fear you, / stand before you trembling, / and whatever you do let everybody praise / saying: Well done, dear king." (593-6). These voices represent the seditionary forces in society, forces which require to be thwarted from above – the aim of collective action should always be the 'common good', of which the king is a symbol and it is his duty to maintain it.[135] In *NC* as in *PF*, the phrase 'common good' resonates in various forms equable between

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[132] Considering the associations of the concept 'gentility' and the use of "facound" in connection to Nature herself (521), the use here cannot be but ironical.

[133] See note 135 below.

[134] Aers 290f.

[135] See Burns 596: "Common good […] referred to collective goods which would benefit all indiscriminately, such as internal and external peace, and the prosperity of the realm. It meant the promotion of common interests, the integrity of one's territory and the preservation of common assets. There was much emphasis on the subordination of individual to communal need. […] Common good also meant maintenance of procedures or facilities, such as common law and sound coinage, which make normal relationships and orderly exchange possible. These were preeminently a ruler's concern: the criterion of 'common good' meant that he should maintain social order, and employ public power and resources for the community, not for personal or partisan gain."

Czech and English.[136] Ondřej of Dubá wrote his laws to further "the king's honour", "the honourability of Bohemia" and, as mentioned, especially the "common good".

It may be, with all the irony present, "difficult to see how it [*PF*] depicts the collective decision-making process in a positive light"[137], nonetheless it depicts it very vividly and in detail. One crucial quality of Chaucer's *PF* is that it is reminiscent of real proceedings of collective decision-making with all the problems accompanying it. Both Smil and Chaucer, in exposing the mishandling of administration and of the discourse of common good in a humorous way, successfully debunk practices which aggrieved their polities. Although Chaucer became an MP probably *after* writing *PF*,[138] he certainly knew, given his other positions in the governmental structures,[139] how policy was really made. From the fashion in which he depicts Nature and her bird subjects in a parliamentary situation it seems apparent that he held the monarch's authority to be the only guarantee of due course of government and justice. The authority, however, as in Smil's composition, must always work only in cooperation with the representatives of the polity, however intolerable they may be. Let us now look at the background, the abstraction behind the practical, technical aspects of governance towards the common good.

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[136] The Czech root morpheme *obec*, originally 'community', appears in the adjective *obecný*, originally 'common, communal, community-related' and that in the phrase *obecné dobré*, literally the 'common good'.

[137] Gwilym Dodd, "Changing perspectives: Parliament, poetry and the 'Civil Service' under Richard II and Henry IV," *Parliamentary History* 25.3 (2006): 307.

[138] See note 23.

[139] R. E. G. Kirk, ed., *The Life-Records of Geoffrey Chaucer*, part IV (London: The Chaucer Society, 1900) xix-xxix.

3. The Cause of Armonye

Thus far, we have examined the text of *PF* only partially, following the obvious analogies with *NC* in the areas of natural allegory and of the portrayal of the assembly. If we are to compare the both texts as complete, unified units, and not only their portions, we must now look at the use of one particular type of 'imagery', that of music. In *PF*, it can be said to figure as the key to the meaning of the poem, the element uniting the various parts into a single text. In the overall design of *NC*, music, presented as a cultural goods accessible to the high and mighty, does not play so much of a prominent role. On the other hand, Čapek aptly notes that it is actually the only art to get seriously treated as such[140] and its role is undoubtedly positive.[141] We shall use the image of music in *NC* as the departure point of our inquiry into how the two poems concur with each other in their depiction of the order of the human world.

3.1. The Sound of Music

Advising the king "in reasonable words", the Starling attaches to a longer statecraft-oriented counsel another one that the king should "like to hear various tales / in songs and in every poem, / [to know] what every word means. / Learn so that you understand / and then can perform too." (1478-82). While here the stress is clearly on understanding the meaning of poetry, we can still see the preferred attitude of the king towards the articulate performing arts. He should cherish their merits, and even actively pursue it where appropriate.

The Starling has quite rightly been labelled "the representative of the ordinary court-poets"[142]. In the same line of criticism (which tried to identify as many of the animals as possible with specific classes), the Nightingale was even seen as the intentional voice of "Smil himself and those poets who were enthusiastic for the Bohemian nation".[143] There must be some credit given to that: the speech truly is modelled as a sort of defence of music and poetry, reflecting the appeal of these in the élite society of late 14th century Bohemia. It is essential that, like the Starling, the Nighting advises "most willingly and gladly" (1683), his charming speech not showing

[140] Unlike architecture, for instance, whose image is strictly utilitarian in the counsels of the Beaver and the Swallow, or the visual arts, which are not represented at all.
[141] Čapek, "Alegorie" 38.
[142] Francis Count Lützow, *A History of Bohemian Literature* (London: Heinemann, 1899) 39.
[143] Ibid. The identification of certain concrete speakers in *NC* with specific professions or classes, upheld by Lützow and to a certain degree criticised by Čapek had probably originated with Jeřábek (1883), see Čapek, "Alegorie" 28.

a shade of irony and is presented in decidedly positive terms. According to the Nightingale, the king should:

> make sure
> to have singing birds,
> masterly singers at that,
> to have his pleasure in that:
> in various exchanging voices,
> where each one separately in his tune
> accords with another into a unity.
>
> (1684-90)

In *PF*, immediately after the narrator enters the garden and gives his landscape and tree catalogues, he is exposed to singing: "On every bow the bryddes herde I synge, / With voys of aungel in here armonye;" (190-1). The Nightingale expounds the qualities of music, equating its positive side explicitly with natural, worldly beneficence to the body: "Listen also to sweet voices / that will make thy heart grow younger / and also your whole natural body, / since it is beneficial to health." (1691-4). In keeping with his dialectical fashion of reminding the reader that the animal world is for him only a useful image of the human one, Smil has first established the connection between the songbird, human voice and music – but then he is free to have the Nightingale use imagery and motives overtly and only human: "Flute and string players, have those too, / and all imaginable sorts of string instruments. / Thus shall thy mind be strengthened, / having such a pastime / out of the sound of extraordinary kinds of music," (1695-9). In *PF*, the string instruments also complement the singing: "Of instruments of strenges in acord / Herde I so pleye a ravisshing swetnesse, / That god, that maker is of al and lord, / Ne herde never better, as I gesse;" (197-200).

The strings were the most harmonic instruments a medieval mind could portray; in contemporary iconography, angels are commonly portrayed as a choir and an orchestra – comprising singers ("voys of aungel") and players of wind[144] and especially string instruments, usually cithers. Curtius found the link between string instruments' sound and birdsong in "12th century mannerism" represented by Walter Map and also, interestingly, by Alan of Lille, one of the explicit inspirational sources for *PF* (316-8), who labels birds

[144] Trumpet, horn or other wind instrument playing angels without the rest of the orchestra had a range of different exegetical significances such as the Annunciation or the Doom.

the "citherists of spring".[145] The metaphor is insisted on still more in the garden entry scene in *PF*, since also the gentlest imaginable wind "Made in the leves grene a noyse softe / Acordaunt to the foules song alofte." (202-4). We may even think of the treetops as of wind instruments created by Nature herself. In an extremely persuasive fashion, Chamberlain explains the systems of musical metaphor which Chaucer knew (and which were commonplace in poetic tradition) and notes the scriptural and philosophical background: strings suggest Biblical context and birdsong is a "sign of heaven", the whole soundscape suggesting the Paradise.[146]

In sum, we are invited to listen to the angelic voice of birds, who later become an allegory of humans, to string instruments, associated with God, and the wind in the trees, the product of Nature, all in accord. Two words need some explanation here, as they are both words Chaucer uses in the Boethian sense, "acord" (or *concordia*) and "armonye" (or *harmonia*). Jacques de Liège, Chaucer's contemporary, and the supreme authority on music, "defines music as "the harmonic modulation of all things related by each other by any measure, […] as any condition of "proportion, concord, order or connection" among all things "sonorous, human, terrestrial, corporeal or spiritual, celestial or supercelestial.""[147] Musical terms thus encompass all areas of medieval thinking and can be interpreted as *ratio* – the right measure, proportion or order in a theological, mathematical, moral, cosmological, medicinal or political concept, to name but a few. In its positive form of the Boethian *acord*, music is the manifestation of the will of God[148] – and in its allegorical design, the springtime garden in *PF* connotes that.

3.2. The Politics of *Reverdie*

The springtime is a key setting in both poems; in *NC*, the beneficial effects to mind and body take place "particularly at springtime / when plants begin to revive / and all creatures are merry, / when May already with manifold flowers / preciously illumines the whole world." (1700-4). Unlike Smil's "plants," "creatures" and "flowers", Chaucer's tree, bird and lanscape catalogues may include negative members but as wholes, they represent the possibility for the world to be ordered and harmonized (after the manner of Bartholomeus Anglicus' categorisations). The insistence on unity is

[145] Curtius 281.
[146] Chamberlain, 48. He refers specifically to *Apocalypse*, 14:2, and to Dante's *Purgatorio*, 28.7-18. Compare *PF* 206-10.
[147] Ibid. 47.
[148] Ibid.

sustained through the use of plurals by which multitudes are imagined, of "blosmy bowes", "floures" of all colours, "welle-stremes" or "smale fishes lighte" (183-9), as opposed to singular appearances which are negative in their isolation.[149] In Chaucer's just as in Smil's poem, springtime provokes the images of order demonstrated as enumerations of multitudes which together form a whole. At the entrance into the pleasance, amidst the marvelling at music, the narrator presents the image of spring as a time of happy procreation and concord, the birds leading forth their young and little hares appearing, and an ideal time for all kinds of harmless animals: little rabbits, shy deer, "Squerels, and bestes smale of gentil kynde." (193-6).

In *PF*, the nightingale is characterized as the bird who "clepeth forth the fresshe leves newe" (352), the conventional herald of spring in the troubadour genre of *reverdie*. Indeed, the same *topoi* are included in the Nightingale's counsel in *NC* as in Chaucer's description of the springtime pleasance. The association of the spring, the nightingale and love poetry has survived the Middle Ages, where all these could complement the portrayal of *locus amoenus*, the "lovely place".[150] Chaucer's description in *PF* (183-210) employs an array of stock images in this tradition but unlike Boccaccio, from whom he translates,[151] Chaucer does not intend to portray a garden of love in the sense of fashionable courtly *amour*.

As Cowgill notes, Christine de Pisan and Philippe de Mézières, French courtly authors of the same age, use strikingly similar natural imagery of peace to depict temporal harmony in their allegories concerned with the right conduct of political life for the common good.[152] In *NC,* the Nightingale is one of the few animals to speak for species other than its own,[153] and we may note the similarity to Chaucer's ideal pleasance: "The linnet praised that advice / and multitudinous small birds too, / every one of them praised those words." (1720-3). The Nightingale here in its advice represents

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[149] Bruce Kent Cowgill, "The Parlement of Foules and the Body Politic," *JEGP: Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 74 (1975): 324. Cowgill notes that "It is no accident that the earlier verses in "blak" are primarily singular, of a barren "tre," a dangerous "streme," and an imprisoned "fish," while the corresponding references inside the delightful garden, "trees clad with leves," "colde welle-stremes," and smale fishes" are plural. The emphasis throughout is away from the selfish toward the "commune.""

[150] See Curtius 193-200.

[151] Part of the section is a translation of Boccaccio's *Teseide* (VII, 51-53), but in the context of Chaucer's poem and of the additions and changes made in the translated passage, it seems clear that Chaucer lifted the few beautifully condensed stanzas of imagery only to enhance his own design. See Muscatine, "Explanatory notes" 997.

[152] Cowgill 322f.

[153] See chapter 1.4.

a community, the speaker thus becoming a vehicle of manifested unity. In the two poems, l*ocus amoenus* need not be associated with the pleasures of *cupiditas*, love as fleshly pursuit, but rather with love as communal solidarity and harmony (thus possibly even with *caritas*, love as a virtue[154]), and in Chaucer's poem love as the power of procreation and thus the manifestation of the rightful fulfilment of natural order and advancement of the avian community.

Medieval 'harmony' can be depicted outside musical terms as well, it being, as we have noted, any manifestation of 'proportion' or 'measure' – and both poems apply these concepts to the natural world as such to describe the paradisial properties of the pleasance; Chaucer has: "The air of that place *so attempre was* / That never was grevaunce of *hoot ne cold*;" (204-5). Rectifying misconceptions about the word "attempre", Walker notes: "*Temperare* was used to describe the condition of *eukrasia* – "health, harmony, balance" – and was associated with expressions for order and musical harmony."[155] Compare the use of the image of the air or atmosphere in the *NC*, and also the use of day-times to signify constancy from which joy or comfort issues:[156]

> Temperate is already the air everywhere
> in which sweet songs are heard
> by day, at night and at dawn too,
> the lovely singing of birds
> in the wood, the grove and the field too.
> In that seek joy and comfort to your will[157].
>
> (1705-10).

The Nightingale concludes with a call for temperance, the Christian virtue which epitomizes the right balance, the proportion to be found in Chaucer's charitable *locus amoenus*. Smil manages to use the properties of the nightingale, the restriction of its song to night-time and to springtime, to propound a look heavenward, into eternity:

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[154] Bernard F. Huppé and D. W. Robertson, Jr., *Fruyt and Chaf: Studies in Chaucer's Allegories* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1963) 102.

[155] Walker 177-8. The healthiness of the garden in *PF* is suggested also by: "There wex ek every *holsum* spice and gras." (205).

[156] Note also how the day-times and also of the different environments listed create a holistic image of time and space, which correlates with what we have seen above in the function of positive phenomena being represented in plural as ordered "multitudes". The image of songbirds populating with their sweet music all places and times thinkable corresponds also to the omnipresence of music perceived by the narrator in *PF*.

[157] For the use of "will" in both poems, especially *NC*, see chapters 3.3-3.5.

Take care to do that *only in such a degree*
so as to praise always with true faith
the God in his creation,
but also in that pleasure
not to dwell all year.
Understand better this speech,
and so *throw enjoyable feasts* [i.e. at night],
but that what is more important –
do not idle that away in this place.
(1711-9)

The pleasurable should thus always be balanced by temperance; in the Nightingale's advice to the Lion, the delights of sweet music and of springtime should, in fact, make the king a better person, relieving his mind and body, and thus enable him to rule better for common good and order and towards life eternal. In *PF*, the same imagery forms an allegory of a working, orderly society governed by *ratio*. When compared, both poems clearly exhibit a consistent use of the conventional and, to a contemporary audience, readily recognisable commonplaces of a troubadour spring poem, a *reverdie* – and, most importantly, the imagery is not being associated with earthly love but with political life and a "figurative emphasis on social concord."[158] In *PF* and in *NC*, distinctive *topoi* of a traditional high medieval genre, which would originally carry the message of love, are carefully preserved but reinterpreted and newly imbued with a completely different type of content, i.e. with political statement.

3.3. The Cosmos

At the beginning of *PF*, the narrator recounts a book he has read, the "Drem of Scipioun", with the explanation that it treats "of hevene and helle / And erthe" (32-3); in *NC*, the Lark sets forth medieval cosmology in equally plain terms: "[after expounding on Heaven and Hell] I return to the world, / which is amidst both, / for it has the Hell below it / and is below the Heaven, as you know." (1600-3); both poems follow this cosmology in their design and portray all of these places, their spatial, and by extension hierarchical relationship. In *NC*, some of the animals, the Lark (1585-98), the Lamb (1225-31) and the Swan (1955-66, 1977-84), describe the two outlying domains unreservedly in Scriptural terms and at length, others allude to it. In one detail, Heaven is described as a place where "there is light without surcease, / in

[158] Cowgill 323.

divinity wondrous love, / there is always day, never night, / woe has no power, / nor [is there] any dearth, / of which my reason is short." (1592-8). Now compare the pleasance in *PF* and note how curiously similar the places are in description: "No man may there waxe sek ne old; / Yit was there joye more a thousandfold / Than man can telle; ne nevere wolde it nyghte, / But ay cler day to any mannes syghte." (207-10); in the cosmological layout of the text's internal space, the pleasance – with all its health, joy and eternal light – is defined clearly in heavenly or paradisial terms.[159]

In *NC*, as much as Heaven is in all references connected to "joy", Hell is a place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth, / eternal darkness, ceaseless sorrow" (1590-1) and "perpetual fire" (1982). This imagery has its place in *PF* as well, where the narrator remarks in the second space of his dream vision, the "temple of bras", how "Derke was that place," with the least possible amount of light to secure visibility (263-4). The images of fire, weeping and sorrow are carefully crafted into a single stanza just after the entrance into the temple, which is thus signalled as the infernal region:

> Withinne the temple, of *syghes* [i.e. sighs] *hote as fyr*
> I herde a swogh [moan, murmur] that gan aboute renne;
> Which syghes were engendred with desyr,
> That *maden every auter for to brenne* [burn]
> *Of newe flaume*; and wel aspyed I thenne
> That *al the cause of sorwes* that they drye [bear]
> Com of the bitter goddesse Ialousye.
>
> (246-52)

The "grene mede" is governed by a sense of community and concord in love, the temple and its surroundings by Jealousy and "Wille" (214), "carnal desire or appetite".[160] The pleasance is natural, the temple is artificial – instead

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[159] In the following acknowledgement of *PF* as a Christian allegory (based on the use of *Somnium* in the opening and on Scriptural allusions), I concur with Robertson and Huppé; nevertheless, given how rich and multifaceted the text is, the idea that Chaucer wrote for his audience only with a somber, religious design seems a little bit strained. See Robertson and Huppé, *Fruyt and Chaf*, 101-48. Cf. J. A W. Bennett, "Some second thoughts on *The Parlement of Foules*," *The Humane Medievalist & Other Essays in English Literature & Learning, from Chaucer to Eliot*. Ed. Piero Boitani (Rome, Storia e Letteratura 1982) 36. Bennett rightly argues that Chaucer does "make use of the *pattern* of the *Somnium* for his different purposes [emphasis original]".

[160] Muscatine, "Explanatory notes" 997.

of the catalogues of birds and trees, we have a catalogue of unhappy lovers that 'died in plight' (285-94) and another one of personifications of human attributes linked to earthly love such as Flattery, Desire, Beauty, Craft or Lust (218-29). In short, the two spaces stand as perfect opposites to each other in just about anything – the temple is an image of Hell as much as the *locus amoenus* is one of Paradise or Heaven. Both poems present the reader with the typical triadic, hierarchical structure of the Middle Ages, the Christian division into Hell, Heaven and Earth. It remains to show that the *parlement* occupies the position of the Earth in the same way as the one in *NC*.

3.4. Contemptus Mundi

Worldly pleasures are, in the Nightingale's speech, ultimately superseded by a call for *contemptio mundi*, an admonition against revelling too much "in this place", the world. Another songbird, the Lark, concludes his diatribe on the world's fickleness and mutability in a same vein: "Let the world change as it pleases, / and keep in you heart the desire / to ask pleadingly / for heavenly bliss / not investing hope in the world." (1627-31). In *PF*, Scipio the Elder also argues that, eventually, all of mankind's deeds will be forgotten, that "oure present worldes lyves space / Nis but a maner deth," (70, 53-4) and since the Earth is so little, deceptive and "ful of harde grace", one "ne shulde hym in the world delyte" (64-66). In the framework of both poems, this world is not to be delighted in since it is, as we shall see, only a place in which to attain a desirable afterlife; when Scipio advises to "Know thyself first immortal" (73), he insists that the first thing to always keep in mind, whatever man does, is the eternity, the afterlife.

Contempt of the world, however, does not signify resignation from public affairs in this life; at first glance, this may seem paradoxical, but it is made sufficiently clear that these are not a matter of delight or pleasure. Scipio's main point is that the stance towards society one assumes determines where he ends up in the afterlife, and the Lion in *NC* is advised to a similar effect. Scipio states that whoever strives for "commune profyt" goes to the Heaven, the "blysful place", repeating it twice (46-9, 74-7). Whoever is responsible for commiting "wikked dede", however, "Shul whirle aboute th'erthe alwey

in peyne." (80, 82), which is "a reference to purgatorial pain that suggested hell to medieval readers."[161] These perpetrators of wicked deeds are the "likerous folk" (79), those who care more for carnal, worldly, personal pleasures than for the good of the community.

While in *PF*, the sorting of men into the two categories is not performed by any agent, in *NC*, it is explicitly stated that the ultimate authority is always God himself. Eagle elaborates on the "inexpressible might" of God over matters of life, death and eternal reward or punishment (130-141), claiming that God reserves the infernal fate for those "Who trespass horridly / and do not do his will, / ungrateful of his gift." (137-9). Throughout his counsel (123-371), which summarizes most of the theological matter contained in the latter ones, the Eagle insists that God should be "feared", "held in awe" and "loved" – only thus may one attain the "paradisial estate" (181). If the king maintains an intense emotional relationship with God, he shall "rule in honour" and his "goods and honour shall last" (147, 149), if not, "then he has to fear everything, / anything created [by God] in this world", namely "evil people, / death, hell, the devil / and whatever befalls him," (172-3, 164-6). He who "fears the world more [than God]" shall be also "accused by his conscience" (161, 169) – in medieval thought, and especially in the era of heightened religiosity of post-Charles IV and pre-Hussite Bohemia, one's personal relationship with God was insisted on as the supreme form of conscience, and one that determined his life in this world as much as in the afterlife.

As to practical conduct, we have already established the main earthly concern of the king is the common good, but this 'common good' is not presented only as a sum of the particular, partisan interests which the king reconciles, for him it is even more so an imperative to act in accordance with God's will. The contempt of the world is defined in *NC* as the shunning of partisan interests, represented by the will of other people or of one's own. The Eagle's view of this world is that people tend to show affection only to those who confer their favours upon them (211-4) and the Ox explains that many of those who would like the king to act on their behalf have evil intents and one can never ingratiate oneself with everybody (966-8), and therefore he must

[161] Bennett 31.

always “First of all keep / to God” in his thought (963-4) – acting in accordance with God's will, the supreme good, and shunning worldly “tempters”[162] is the only possibility for a ruler to rule justly.[163] If one refuses to shun his own and abide God's will, he cannot attain Heaven and shall have to obey devils after death, adds the Parrot (1525-44). The king, whose supreme task is to maintain the common good, is the representative of God on earth, therefore he must fulfil God's will and not his own. In turn, the will of God, if obeyed, shall ensure the common good.

3.5. Interpreting Law

In his account of the fates of men, Scipio also states the dichotomy as one between the “rightful folk” and the “brekers of the lawe” (55, 78). This is highly pertinent to our problem since the will of God was equalled, from Thomas Aquinas onwards, with 'eternal law'. This was the supreme, abstract principle which manifested itself in the world as 'natural law', and ultimately it should have always been the model for 'positive law' which people instituted for the purpose of governing their own communities. If we are to connect the different wordings of *NC* and *PF*, to be “rightful” means, through abiding the rules men have laid upon themselves, to fulfil the will of God – both poems thus refer to the same Aquinian principle of eternal law.[164]

The figures responsible for translating the higher law into the lesser domain are Nature (from eternal to natural) and King (from both into positive). Smil shows acquaintance with scholasticism[165] in the Eagle's counsel where he briefly states that not only devotion but also human reason proves that it is prudent to love God (192-8). It is also the only time he specifically mentions human “nature” as mediating God's will to humans (“And it is nature that leads [men] to that [rational love of God].”[166]), otherwise in *NC*, the king is

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[162] As Čapek nicknames the ironical councillors of the Wolf and Vulture kind. Čapek, “Vznik a funkce” 21.

[163] “The common good could also be taken as a collective total, the sum of the purposes at work within the group. But it could also stand for a universal value neither increased nor diminished by the number of things which share in it, and *at least once it was identified* [by Aquinas] *with God himself*.” Thomas Gilby, *Principality and Polity: Aquinas and the Rise of State Theory in the West* (London: Longmans, 1958) 242-3.

[164] Gilby 136. “The Eternal Law in the mind of God was the first exemplar of all law and government.”

[165] We must, after all, remember he had received a Bachelor's title from University.

[166] The word “nature” here does not refer to the material concept or its personification but to the principle, cf. the meanings of “kynde” in MED.

responsible for effectuating eternal law directly into positive. We have examined the eminent role the two authors give to the figure of the monarch in proceedings of law: without his guidance, law and order are not be enforceable and communities become vulnerable; the king is the guarantor of due process, the figurehead of justice and the final instance for all his subjects[167] – and all this authority is, in the design of the two texts, ultimately traceable to God.

By the Lamb, the allegory of Christ's humility, the king is informed that it is "God for whom you were made" (1218), and in the very beginning of the first counsel, the Eagle advises "keep always the remembrance of God / *who chose you from many* / and gave you people, goods and honour." (127-9). It is the Turtle-dove, possibly personifying the clergy,[168] who explains the concept of the deputyship in clear terms: "God elevated you here / above people *in his stead*" to do "everything that is his will, / having spiritual counsel in that, / asking God's will." (1140-6); the king, and by extension any human being, must always follow the will of God, the eternal law. What differs the king from the average man is his responsibility – since "the king is never without company", he shall be "by example"draw his subjects with him to Heaven or Hell, wherever he ends up for his deeds – ruling people, acting as the interpreter of eternal law, entails a burden of spiritual responsibility (400-15).

We have already established that Nature in *PF* represents God as his "vicaire", his deputy on earth.[169] God's customary epithets are "makere […] of al and lord"; the latter attribute, that of lordship, has been shown as fulfilled by Nature in that she acts as a ruler in practice. The former function, that of the Creator, is also accomplished by her – she is the *natura naturans*, the creating, active nature (as opposed to *natura naturata*, the passive, created version).[170] She presents the tercel eagle as one "Which I have formed, as ye may wel se, / In every part as it best liketh me," taking on the role of *artifex natura*, the reminiscence being that of God creating Man to his image.[171] In governing the

[167] See chapters 2.1.-2.3.
[168] See chapter 1.5.
[169] See chapter 2.1.
[170] For the description of Nature's various interconnected roles, I am indebted to the in-depth analysis in Economou, *The Goddess Natura*. See esp. p. 33-6 and 141-50.
[171] Cf. *Piers the Plowman*, IX 25-32. There, Nature is equalled to God the Father: "Kynde […] is the creatour of alle kynnes thynges, / Fader and formour of al that evere was maked – / And that is the grete

natural world, Nature is the interpreter of eternal law into natural. This is true for all her roles in which she institutes the right natural order: as the renewing *natura procreatrix*, as *mater generationis*,[172] ensuring "the whole cycle of life"[173] and as *natura pronuba*, the guarantor of nuptials, securing the birds' mating process which must precede the procreation itself.

It is true that there is no "will of God" set out in *PF*, and Olson believes that the hierarchy of 'law' from God through Nature through the monarch through to the people is only implicit.[174] There is, however, a principle representing the three degrees of 'law' which connects all the domains explicitly, and that is the musical metaphor of proportion and measure, which is set out by Scipio – he compares how "lytel erthe" is "At regard of hevenes quantite" (57-8), using the language of *ratio* to describe the desirability of Heaven over the earth. More imporantly, he explains that it is the melody of spheres "That welle is of musik and melodye / In this world here, and cause of armonye." (59-63): the heavenly music of the spheres is the source of all other harmony, proportion and order. As we have seen, the heavenly or paradisial properties of the *locus amoenus* are conveyed in this idiom.[175] Nature is designated, to quote in full, the "vicaire of the almyghty Lord / That hot, cold, hevy, lyght, moyst, and dreye / Hath knyt *by evene noumbres of acord*" (379-81); we see that Nature's vicariate consists in working 'in the right proportions', which precisely that which we have recognised in the pleasance, in the natural world she had created – the musical metaphor of *ratio* thus, ultimately, goes directly back to God.

Therefore, when Nature's halls and bowers of branches are described as designed by "here *mesure*", the birds choose their mates "by hire *acord*", the subtext always stays that she is partaking in God's design. In the *parlement*, which we now can see as the allegory of the human world, the birds in their discord are kept in the bounds of the musical metaphor, always making "noyse", as noted by the narrator (312, 491, 500) but also by Nature herself (523). When

God that gynnyng hadde nevere, / Lord of lif and of light, […] / Ac man is hym moost lik of marc and of shafte. / For thorugh the word that he spak woxen forth beestes."

172 For a psychoanalytical reading of *PF* based on Nature's maternal role, see Krier.

173 Curtius 112.

174 Olson 262.

175 Chamberlain notes also one musical reference denoting the infernal character of the "temple of bras", comparing the "frenetic endless dancing" there (232-5) and Scipio's description of the painful whirling of sinners (80). See Chamberlain 64.

the solution is finally found, Nature gives each fowl his mate "by evene acord" and the roundel is sung, the birds again returning from the discontented noise towards rational music,[176] and the community emerges from disorder back to peace.

By virtue of the metaphor of proportion and measure, the principles along which the polity described in Chaucer's allegory should be governed are clearly linked to a supreme authority. In this, the *PF* shares common grounds with *NC*, even if Smil asserts his idea of the authority in terms much more explicit, displaying his heightened religiosity. In the issue common to the two texts, that of the right governance of human affairs, the will of God in *NC* and the music of the spheres in *PF* can be understood as, fundamentally, the identical concept: the highest precept which shall, if duly abided by, ensure the *bonum commune*.

3.6. The Need to Choose

As we have noted in the introduction, the construction of both poems is based on juxtapositions of anitthetical parts.[177] As natural allegories, both highlight the opposition between the natural and the human world, as has been shown in the first chapter. On the political level, they show the difference between the bad and the good comport in governing human affairs, between the common good and the self-interest, between concord and discord, as has been shown in the second chapter. To weave this political statement into a larger framework of life and death, they use the cosmological contrast between between Heaven and Hell, as has been discussed in the last chapter. The disposition into irreconcilable opposites is accompanied by the need for the reader to choose between them. As moral allegories on one's comportment in earthly life, the compositions cannot be understood as mere aesthetic exercises detached from their audiences and their world – as we have seen, both poems show the reader the 'right' choices as desirable and the 'wrong' ones in a negative light, trying to convince him dialectically rather than authoritatively.

[176] See Bennett 44-5. "[…] a *roundel* or *rondeau*, a harmony, an earthly counterpart in miniature to the music of the spheres;" Bennett also remarks on the fact that the roundel is said to have been "maked in Fraunce", a country of undisputed authority on musical harmony in the 14th century.

[177] See chapter "Plots and Structure" in the Introduction.

In fact, both authors turn to the reader and present him personally with the choice between solidarity and selfishness, between Heaven and Hell.

We have already noted how Smil addresses his audience directly and authoritatively, persuading them to reflect on the merits of the various counsels and perceive the text as a didactic enterprise.[178] Speeches couched in the second person and in the present tense instill the text with a sense of immediacy, as if the reader himself were directly addressed. That the world order applies to everyone, not solely the allegorical addressee, is emphasised in the conclusion made by the Swan (1929-2117), who reiterates the cosmology and eschatology with renewed force. Her speech is modelled as an address to the sinner, with this life being portrayed, similarly to Scipio's account, as a "swift run towards death" (1942), and painful repentance and atonement in one's conscience as the sole way to salvation.

What is extremely remarkable about this counsel, besides its indubitable poetic quality, is how it addresses the reader directly, the last address to the 'king' occurring 120 lines before the its end. From there onwards, terms of address disappear altogether, though addresses are still in the second person (1996-2046); then, the Last Judgement is evoked in a passage of a complete sensory overload, the impersonal character of which emphasises that the Apocalypse applies universally (2047-68); in the final part, the addresses of the text follow thus: "Woe to thee, miserable sinner" (2069), "Hear this, whoever stands unashamed of his sins" (2079), "Hear, thou Christian seized by sin" (2096) and "Hear, you who have ears for hearing" (2108). In this last part, there also appears a multitude of voices speaking, that of personified sins (2072), of God (2083-6) and of the unrepentant sinner (2098-100).

As a consequence of these extraordinary changes in style, with the reader being put *in medias res* and addressed directly the text gains exceptional imminence. Furthermore, Smil never returns to the original frame of the animal *consilium*, quite contrarily, concluding with a plea to Christ and "Amen." (2114-7), he keeps the idiom of a personal penitential exhortation to the very end. It is thus evident that the poem's message is dedicated not to a hypothetical in-text figure, but that the real addressee is the reader, the universal Christian man who

[178] See 1.1.

needs guidance in his life. It is the reader himself who must, with the help of the author's hints, choose the right way, the “single narrow path” (1968).

In *PF*, as Chaucer's narrator enters his dream, he is led by Scipio, who he had been reading about before, to a gate with a pair of Dantean inscriptions on it, one in black and the other in gold (127-40).[179] The golden one invites the narrator to the heavenly pleasance and the other to the place we have noted as infernal. As both lie behind the same gate, in the same “park walled with grene ston”, the narrator is both afraid of entering the fearsome place and tempted to reach the pleasant one: “No wit hadde I, for errour, for to chese / To entre or flen, or me to save or lese.” (146-7). Watching the narrator's dilemma, Scipio shoves him through, in order to force him to make his own judgement of the two places and also to 'show him matter of which to write' (155-68), and deserts him. This situation has three important implications for us.

First, the narrator and the reader are implied by Chaucer to be taking the identical journey: the narrator is addressed by the gate's inscription as “thow redere”, matching “you who enter” used in *Inferno*, but giving the text a greater immediacy: the reader reads the inscription as much as the narrator does, and so it can always be him who is the addressee of the inscription and, by extension, the witness of the whole vision. Second, the narrator is, whether he initially likes it or not, put into a position where he has to choose between the two, between the “blysful place” and the “sorweful were” (127, 138). In Scipio's previous exposition of cosmology, it is made clear that everyone is subject to it, that the eschatology is inescapable and that the only thing one can do is to choose between the two alternatives of Heaven and Hell. When the narrator is pushed through the gate, he is thus exposed to the same principle: he cannot flee the choice as he contemplated to do, and is left with only the two options.

Third, once inside the garden without Scipio, the narrator assumes the role of the guide – he becomes an observer and a reteller, never actually intervening into the action of the vision, but showing the allegorical cosmology to the reader in the manner in which Scipio showed his grandson the real one.

[179] In the inscriptions, the threefold repetition of the phrase “Thorgh me men gon [into, unto …]” is a translation of Dante's threefold use of “Per me si va” on the gate to Hell in *Divine Comedy* (*Inferno* III.1-9).

The major difference between Scipio's account and that of the narrator is that in the latter, the portrayal of earthly affairs is extended into a full-fledged scene. In this scene, in the avian parliament, the problem of choice between the 'common profit' and the 'wikked dede' is exemplified, as has been described. Thus, the narrator presents the reader with the same pair of choices, in action, that Scipio gave to his grandson in the book, in words. The society which the narrator witnesses makes the right choice and thus gives the reader a precept, but, as in Smil's poem, it is up to the reader whether he will follow it.

Conclusion

The Parliament of Fowls and *The New Council* have been approached in search of parallel structural features and of commonly shared *topoi*, and the inquiry has proven successful in a number of areas. The authors use the identical devices to persuade the reader to comprehend nature as an allegory, chiefly the antrophomorphisation of animals – the beasts and birds gain human attributes, human attitudes, but also human physique; on the basis of their natural and symbolical properties, animals represent human values and social classes, while systems of natural classification and hierarchy are transposed into human social organisations. In both poems, natural world is thus thoroughly humanised and the specific animals' roles are curiously matching in both poems, the same birds often representing the same values and classes.

Once the reader understands the animals as social beings, in each of the poems, they act out a political assembly before his eyes. This *consilium* or *parlement* represents, in its narrower sense, the image of the political congregation as Smil's, respectively Chaucer's audience would have known it. The authors construct the world of contemporary politics with the use of pertinent legal and political terminology. In the broader sense, it is in both cases an allegory of the ideal polity – the forces upholding the common good prevail, represented by the monarch in both poems and in *NC* also by the good counsellors. In both poems, the selfish, discordant elements in the society are also debunked by the same means, that of irony and humour.

Finally, both poems exhibit the exact same cosmology and eschatology. The theological background the two late 14th century writers have inherited is projected into their concept of monarchical authority, into their portrayal of the afterlife and into their understanding of this world as a transitional period in human life. Both poems set forth these universal belief systems before the reader and attempt to aid him to make the right decisions in problems which these belief systems pose. Smil and Chaucer present the options to choose from in a dialectical fashion, seemingly leaving the choice up to the reader, but in both poems, it is made clear which way is to be taken – in that, Chaucer's poem may be understood as didactic as Smil's, even if less openly so.

The main difference between *PF* and *NC* is that Smil discloses his literary methods, his political concerns and his value and belief systems forthrightly and openly, while Chaucer manages to keep these more or less implied, using conceits and metaphors which require the reader to be versed in high culture of the time. Smil's poem can speak roughly in the same way to anybody willing to read it and to accept its devotional and sometimes even pathetic tone, since the whole cosmology and value hierarchy is contained at various places of the text and available to any Christian. In Chaucer's case, one needs more outside knowledge, from mythology to musical theory, to grasp some of the concepts which meander through the texts. This may be, ultimately, revealing also of the difference between the audiences for which the two authors would write – Chaucer's certainly being the more refined one in literary and cultural taste, and Smil's the more religious.

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