

Matouš Turek

“Parlement of Foules” and “New Council”: Medieval Assemblies of Animals in an Anglo-Bohemian Perspective

(ÚALK, FF UK, Praha 2011, 69 pp.)

Opponent's review

The thesis presents a thorough and complex comparison of the two poems, building on topological analysis as a basis which provides the material for locating the texts in the contemporary social, political, and broadly conceptual context. The central argument which shows the relation of the two poems to the medieval encyclopaedic tradition, especially the allusive and nuanced use of its conventions, is well argued and illustrated. Impressive and, I dare say, outstanding at the level of BA thesis is the scope and range of both primary and secondary material integrated in the work which bears witness to an assured orientation in the field of medieval literature and culture in general on the part of the author. Even though the last chapter shows some haste in final editing, this does not affect its conceptual quality. In all respects, Matouš Turek has produced a mature academic work which I consider fully acceptable even for an MA level.

Consequently, my remarks are only minor and are directed mainly towards clarification of the relative weight of some concepts used in the analysis as well as the possibilities of further development of the theme.

1. In both *PF* and *NC* Matouš Turek sees the authors as applying a principle of juxtaposing disparate or opposed claims and statements, leaving the interpretation and value judgement to the reader. While Chaucer's works are notoriously seen as rather open-ended, does this hold also for Smil, with regard to the frequency of authorial comment using the speakers' *proprietates* to extend a value judgement on their advice? Is this “relational” principle fully justifiable as a descriptive term for either or both of the poems, and how is it related to the emphasis both works place on hierarchy and order?
2. On p. 27, the author uses the term “alienation” in reference to the unexpected intrusion of naturalistic detail in the established allegorical frame. Could the concept be more clearly explained?
3. I see some thematic overlap in the content of chapters 1.4 (Categorisation into Species) and 1.5 (Species as Estates). More importantly, though the “social coding” of individual species is amply illustrated, it remains unclear, in confrontation with later comments where the focus changes (*NC*: Lamb, Lark, Stork, Swallow), to what extent Matouš Turek sees this element as systematically employed, i.e. whether he would see it as associative in establishing a loose social context or whether the parallels adduced for individual speakers represent a consistent perspective.
4. Use of heraldic symbolism: with regard to Czech heraldic terminology it might be better to speak of symbolic rather than strictly heraldic associations in *NC*.
5. Concerning the theme of kingship: aside from the parallels adduced, is this aspect in any way influenced by the assignment of the ruler role to Nature and the Lion respectively? Does this constitute any major difference in the treatment of kingship in the two poems?

Conclusion: I recommend the thesis for defence with EXCELLENT mark.

Prague, 1 September 2011

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