

**STRUCTURE AS MEANING IN CHAUCER'S  
«The Parliament of Fowls» and «The Book of The Duchess»**

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*The Parliament of Fowls* is considered imperfect in structure and fundamentally disunited. Some critics attribute this disunity to its different sources, (1) Emile Legouis describes it as «a curious imitation of all sorts» and «a strange mixture.» (2) R.K. Root says :

«Structurally considered, the work is far from perfect; for the real action of the piece does not begin till nearly 300 lines have rolled melodiously by. Beautiful as is the description of the garden of love, its length is both relatively and absolutely extravagant. Quite unnecessary to the action, is the synopsis of the Somnium Scipious with which the poem begins, an unfortunate bit of introductory machinery ... it is not till Chaucer has finished his introductions and has left his authors well behind him, that the conventional gives place to the natural and poet's genius plays freely». (3)

A second reason for the accusation of disunity is the difference in tone and content of each of the composing parts of the poem. The first part, Scipio's dream, is considered very serious, somber, and a sort of religious moral sermon on the triviality of this world in comparison to the celestial one. The garden of love is regarded by G. Williams as a «luscious sensual, almost sensual description». (4) The third part, the assembly of birds, is

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(1) Briefly, these sources are a «day» by Marie de France entitled *Li Parlamens des Oiseaus pour fair Roi* ; Alain de L'Isle, *Complaint of Nature* ; Macrobius, *Commentary on The Dream of Scipio* ; *The Romance of the Rose* ; Dante's *Divine comedy* and Boccaccio's *Teseide*.

(2) Legouis, Emile, *Geoffery Chaucer*, Paris 1910, London 1913, N.Y., 1961, P. 55.

(3) Root, R.K., *The Poetry of Chaucer*, Boston, 1922, P. 103.

(4) Williams, G., *A new View of Chaucer*, Duke University Press, 1965, P. 267.

«satirical, half- humorous and half-courtly dramatically handled story of love-dispute».(5)

On the other hand, Muscatine, distinguishes between two techniques and comes to the conclusion that the first part of the poem possesses an ironic flavour. He suggests that the love vision is not taken with perfect seriousness; whereas the second part, beginning with the appearance of «Nature» shows Chaucer as a dramatic writer. He claims that there is a disruption at this point and the poem seems to begin anew<sup>(6)</sup>.

Likewise, the origin of *The Book of the Duchess* and the techniques used in it have been the subject of so many studies that aimed at identifying and relating the work of art to its French and Classical sources. (7) That limited and, in many cases, detrimental criticism led R.O. Payne to describe the poem in his book, *The Key of Remembrance*, as a «combinative structure» or «a tripartite structure». He even reduces the work to a scientific formula of : book — experience-dream. (8)

Such critical views roused my surprise and curiosity : my surprise, because I wondered why those critics detracted from the literary value of these two poems; my curiosity, because they motivated me to study them with a new approach and from a different angle. Usually,

«critics ask where art comes from, how it becomes what it is, and what it does ; their questions are about *the Source, the Form, the End of art*. The first question, which concerns the artist's experience, emphasizes the matter that goes into art; the second, which analyses the structural elements that compose the work as a whole, emphasizes the qualities of art in itself, the formal means ; the third, which examines the response of the audience, emphasizes the function of art.» (9)

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(5) Ibid. P. 118

(6) Muscatine, C., *Chaucer and The French Tradition*, California U.P. ; 1966, pp.

(7) a) Robinson, F.N. (ed), *The Works of G. Chaucer*, Oxford University Press, London, 1957, 2nd ed., p. 266.

155, 116.

b) Ibid. p. 773, 774.

c) Kittredge, G.L., *Chaucer and His Poetry*, Harvard Univesrtiy Press, Cambridge,

d) Clemen, W. *Chaucer's Early Poetry*, Methuen & Co., London, 1963, pp. 23 ff. 1963, pp. 54—72

e) Chaucer himself acknowledges that when he says at the beginning of the dream: «And alle the walles with colours fyne were peynted, bothe test and glose, of al the Romance of the Rose.»

(8) Payne, R.O., *The Key of Remebrance*, N. Haven, Yale University Press, 1963, P. 189.

(9) Schorer, M., J. Miles, G. Mckenzie (ed.), *Criticism, The Foundations of Modern Literary Judgment*, Hartcourt, Brace & World, Inc., N.Y., 1948 — 1958, P. VIII.

The critics of *The Parliament of Fowls* and *The Book of the Duchess* are only a few of those who discriminate between «*the source, the form and the end of art*»; in other words, between *the structure and the meaning*. We often read critical works that make a sharp distinction between what they call «structure and texture» or «form and content» assuming that the composition of the work and the expression of its meaning are two separate procedures; while, in reality, the act of creation is one integral process. (10) These distinctions

«are varieties of emphasis only. The difference is not radical, and it is probably a loss to insight whenever a critic takes so «pure a position as to make his emphasis appear so. In the *Poetics*, Aristotle is no doubt most interested in the definition of the genre, tragedy, yet when he writes of pity and terror and the purgation which these induce in the beholder, he is concerned with its results.» (11)

Therefore I propose to prove the assumption that structure is meaning through an analytical study of two Chaucerian works: *The Parliament of Fowls* and *The Book of the Duchess*. The choice of these poems is purposeful because they have been unjustly criticized and passed away as disunified. It is true that Chaucer relied upon different sources for the material of his poems; and that the poems contain a variety of tones and methods of treatment but these reasons are insufficient for detracting from their meaning and value. On the contrary, Chaucer has skilfully manipulated his diverse subject-matter to express his themes. He managed to create meaning out of the incongruous elements and this is wherein Chaucer's originality is best shown.

## PART I

The theme of *The Parliament of Fowls* is stated in the first two stanzas, in a piece of «sententia» marked by a very sonorous elevated

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(10) «The Russian Formalists most vigorously objected to the old dichotomy of «content versus form», which cuts a work of art into two halves: a crude content and a superimposed, purely external form ..... At first sight the boundary line may seem fairly definite. If we understand by content the ideas and emotions conveyed in a work of literature, the form would include all linguistic elements by which contents are expressed. But if we examine this distinction more closely, we see that content implies some elements of form: e.g. the events told in a novel are parts of the content, while the way in which they are arranged into a «plot» is part of the form. Dissociated from this way of arrangement they have no artistic effect whatsoever.» Wellek, R. and Warren, A., *The Analysis of the Literary Work of Art*, quoted in *Modern Criticism*, Rusbdy, R. (ed.) Anglo-Egyptian Bookshop, Cairo, 1952, p. 88.

(11) Op. cit., Schorer, M. et al., p. VIII.

tone ; it is Love with its «wonderful werkyng» (12) and his «myrakles and his crewel yre» (13). This foretells in a grave tone that he is going to treat Love in its various aspects. As the poem proceeds the idea of Love is expressed and elaborated by different means and in different ways. First we are introduced to the narrator who is fond of reading partly for pleasure and partly for learning, but mainly for «a certeyn thing to lerne.» (14). Accordingly Huppe and Robertson believe that this thing is «Wisdom» and though the poem treats Love on its various levels, it is dedicated to «Wisdom». (15)

Such an opinion may be confirmed by the ending of the poem when the narrator says after he wakes :

«I wok, and othere bokes tok me to  
To reede upon, and yit I rede alwey.  
That I shall mete som thyng for to fare  
The bet, and thus to rede I nyl nat spare.»  
11. 695—699

On the other hand, Wisdom or reading might be the ultimate consolation for the vanity of earthly life with its varied forms of Love ; though S.S. Hussey believes that such references are common in Chaucer's early poems where he «often speaks of his bedside reading as he does in *The House of Fame* and *The Book of The Duchess*.» (16)

However, the book our narrator reads is *Tullyus of The Dream of Scipio*. We move from the high-resounding first two stanzas, to the three simple narrative stanzas that follow and, finally, to the serious dream of scipio. The tone of the dream is different : it is rendered first in the form of warning,

«And warnede hym befor of al his grace,  
And seyde hym what man, lered other lewed  
That lovede commune profyt, wel ithewed,  
He shulde into a blysfyl place wende,  
There as joye is that last with outen ende.»  
11. 45—49

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(12) Op. cit., Robinson, P. 310, L. 5.

(13) Ibid., 1. 11

(14) Ibid., 1. 20

(15) Huppe, B.F. and D.W. Robertson, *Fruyt and Chaf*, Princeton University Press, 1963, pp. 32 ff.

(16) Hussey, S.S., *Chaucer, An Introduction*, Methuan & Co., London, 1971, p. 7 and p. 11.

and then in the form of order,

«And he seyde, «know thyself first immortal,»  
 And loke ay besyly thow werche and wysse  
 To commune profit, and thow shalt not mysse  
 To comen swiftly to that place deere  
 That full of blysse is and of soules cleere.»

11. 73—77

In both addresses «the commune profyte» or the general good is repeated. The repetition is for emphasis, because «commune profyte» is the opposite of self-love. The main theme of the dream is the futility of earthly love in contrast to common good. The followers of common good will go to «the hevене bliss» while «the brekers of the lawe» and the «likerous folk» (17) will be tortured and tormented before they are admitted to that realm. Hence the dream of Scipio is not irrelevant (18) in meaning to the main theme of the poem though the tone is different. It is connected with the first two stanzas and serves as a proem to the following parts. Affricanus is the link between the dream of Scipio and our dreamer, because it is he, still who makes him dream. (19) But immediately after that we have the old stanza in which the dreamer invokes Cytherea, Venus, to help him and to give him

«myght to ryme and ek to endyte.»

1.119

It seems odd because, after the praise of heavenly love in Scipio's dream and the attack of «lecherous folk» and the «breakers of the law of Nature» we do not expect the poet to proceed in praising Venus. He is simply sliding her to her place in the «north-north-west» ; she is no more placed in the forefront. Here, the ironic skill of Chaucer is clear though he does not continue that vein, for he returns again to serious Affricanus who takes him to the «park walled with grene ston.» The garden has a double gate and the contrast between the two entrances serves the meaning. Through one gate he may pass to «the blyssful place» and the «will of grace» where «grene and lusty May shal

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(17) Op. cit., Robinson, P. 311 11. 78 — 84 See also : Kean, P.M., Chaucer and The Making for English Poetry, Vol. I, Love Vision & Debate, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1972, p. 162 & 163.

(18) Supra, p. 1

(19) See also : Op. cit., Hussey, p. 44.

ever endure.» This is natural love, not courtly love because there is growth and fertility. Through the other side we have barren sorrow and despair ;

«Ther nevere tre shal fruyt ne leves bere.»

1.137

This foreshadows the result of «courtly love» as we shall see later in the assembly of birds when the royal eagle will ask for a «Sovereign lady and not a mate.» To make the contrast between the two kinds of Love more distinct Chaucer emphasises the colour of the inscription :

«These vers of gold and blak iwriten were,»

1. 141

The garden that Chaucer describes is not the garden of *The Romance of the Rose*, that is the garden of courtly love ; and it is not paradize, the world before the Fall. It includes contrasting elements : Venus as opposed to Nature, Courtly Love versus Natural Love, Earthly love versus Heavenly Love — all designed to show that the pleasures of earthly love are deceiving and that they are a corruption of true love which has been expressed as the common profit by Affricanus. In ll. 176 — 182 we have a catalogue of trees borrowed from Boccaccio's *Teseide*, but Chaucer shows independence in his use of the epithets to give meaning to the description ; the trees are described in terms of their usefulness to man. He also adds some new kinds of trees such as : «byldere ok», «piler elm», «holm to whippes lashe» and «sheltere ew». Then he moves to the beautiful description of the blossomy boughs colourful flowers and the merry birds. It was a place so attempre was

«That nevere was ther grevaunce of hot ne cold ;

There wex ek every holsom spice and gras » ;

11. 204 — 207

From here we see «Under a tre, besyde a wellle Cupide with his arwes, forge and file» and «Wile», his daughter, ready to shoot their arrows. Venus was surrounded by Plesance, Aray, Lust, Curteysie and Craft, Flaterye, Desyr, Meede ..... Inside the temple was painted many a story of those who were ruined by earthly love and we have a catalogue of those names....In the portrayal of Venus and her surroundings we have nothing but lust, disgust and evil. The effect is to emphasise the fleeting and illusory character of carnal satisfaction as well as the suffering and frustration of passion.

In line 298, we meet another Queen, the complete opposite of Venus — «the noble goddess Nature» holding a counsel on St. Valentine's day when birds choose their mates within the rules and regulations of God, and she, as his deputy.

Their desire is the fulfillment of God's commandment and not self-gratification. This second part of the poem shows Chaucer as a dramatic writer. As Muscatine says, the

«movement in the second part is sequential, if not plotlike. The long catalogue of birds at its beginning is securely related to the action in subject and theme ..... Nature behaves ... functionally and not decoratively.» (20)

We have a logical arrangement of dialogue between the birds. Moreover, we have some legal terms that give the debate a realistic flavour — e. g. : «delyre», «charge», «remedie», «statute», «ordinance». At this point arises the question of political satire in this part of the poem. Some critics think that Chaucer found an opportunity to bring into his picture satirical observations on contemporary political affairs by adding allusions to the storming debates of the God Parliament. In this he deviated from his literary models and did violence to his allegory. (21) In reply to these interpretations we can say that the use of the parliamentary procedure for debate was a common convention in the Middle Ages and was used in the lays of Marie de France, one of Chaucer's sources. The satire embodied in the debate was against courtly love. The parliament has corrupted the order of Nature, because each bird acted according to his own self-interest. It has corrupted the order of man as established by God and administered by his deputy.

This corruption starts when the royal eagle choses a «soverayn lady and not a Mate». Here we have pure courtly love convention and two other eagles pursue the same line. In other words the birds of prey represent the courtly lovers. In contrast to them we have the lowly birds, also each acting according to his own self-interest and not the common profit or the order of Nature. The goose says :

«But she wol love hym, lat hym love another».

1.567

because she wants to get her mate and fly off. The duck, in the same manner says mockingly :

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(20) Op. Cit., Muscatine, p. 116

(21) Tyrwhitt, Koch, Emerson, Manly, Richey adopted this view. See Robinson, P. 791, 795.

«Wel bourded, «quod the doke», by myn hat :  
That men shulde loven alwey causeless,  
Who can a resoun fynde or wit in that ?  
Daunseth he murye that is myrtheles ?  
Who shulde recche of that is reckeles  
Ye que. «yit seyde the doke, ful wel and fayre,  
«There been no sterres, God wot, than a payre.»

11. 589 — 595

Then cuckoo says :

«So I, «quod he,» may have my make in pes,  
I reche nat how longe that ye stryve.  
Lat ech of hem be soley n al here lyve.»

11. 605 — 608

Each bird acts according to his own will and self—interest. This fact is revealed through the dialogue till, by the refusal of the female eagle, the inversion of values which the poet set out to perform is complete and the poem progresses towards its goal of the «commune profyte» achieved through natural married love for the rest of the birds.

«And whan this werk al brought was to an ende,  
To every foul Nature yaf his make  
By evene acord and on here way they wende.  
And Lord, the blisse and joye that they make.  
For ech of hem gan other in wynges take,  
And, with here nekkes ech gan other wynde,  
Thankynge alwey the noble goddesse of Kynde.»

11. 666 — 672

This is not different from Scipio's message, 11, 73 —77 (22) because finally the themes of «commune profyte» and «selfless love» are enmeshed and self — interest becomes the core of all evil and corruption.

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(22) Supra p. 6.

PART II

*The Book of the Duchess* was written in commemoration of the death of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster and the first wife of John of Gaunt. In *The Legend of Good Women*, Chaucer referred to it as *The Death of Blanche the Duchesse*. She died in September 1369 and the Book was probably composed within the next few months. It is an elegy, a consolation of a patron and a eulogy of his wife; but there is more than that in the poem. It stands as a self-contained and impersonal work of art. There is no overt mention of the Duke or his wife, for Chaucer has so detached himself from the scene by a skilful use of familiar literary conventions. He chooses the form of the vision because in the dream the

«bereaved lover gives just such a literal account of his past happiness and presents sorrow as he might have given in waking life ... the dream renders possible a more intimate picture of his patron's loss than would have been seemly on other terms». (23)

Hence, the result is not a «rhetorical obituary ... but a tribute of pure love from the lady's equal, who can speak without constraint, ... (24) In other words, the dreamer is a substitute — figure, through whom Chaucer can make an appeal for a cessation of grief without the indelicacy of direct approach. B.A. Bronson develops the point further by saying that, through the dream convention, Chaucer laments Blanche as two persons : himself and her husband. He says :

«The Knight is the dreamer's surrogate ...  
The train of analysis would lead us to assume  
a kindred connection between the lady of the dream and  
the fair but cruel «physician» who refuses to work a cure  
in the Dreamer's waking life.» (25)

Such an interpretation would take us very close to E. Legouis' criticism in which he identifies the dreamer with Chaucer, condemns the poem for lack of originality and describes it as a «voluminous and composite funeral monument, which surprises us today by its artificiality rather than ingeniously complicated plan.» (26) This severe

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(23) Lewis, C.S., *The Allegory of Love*, Oxford, 1936, pp. 167, 168.

(24) Op. Cit., Kittredge, p. 29.

(25) Bronson, B.N. «*The Book of the Duchess Re-opened*». PMLA, LXVII, 1952, pp. 863—81, reprinted in Wagenknecht E. (ed.) *Chaucer Modern Essays in Criticism*, p. 281.

(26) Op. Cit., Legouis E., p. 97.

criticism of Legouis is the complete opposite of Lewis's, because we do not get in the *Book of the Duchess* a formal bombastic, insincere consolation of a vassal to his liege. The poem does not leave on us a feeling of heaviness and depression. On the contrary, through the use of the dream convention and the ensuing artistic detachment of the writer we get a feeling of health and consolation, similar to what the knight gets after pouring out his grief. The poet's objective in the elegy is to afford comfort and not to invite sorrow; the convention he uses serves his purpose.

But although C.S. Lewis praises the dream convention as adopted in the elegy, he gives an unconvincing reason for Chaucer's use of it. He proceeds to say,

«... it would be rash to assume that Chaucer consciously chose it with this in view ... The use of the dream ... is a device of French poets, and I think Chaucer followed it chiefly because he enjoyed it.» (27)

Such a statement contradicts Lewis's former comments. Chaucer was a diplomat, a man of learning and wisdom; and, above all, a conscious artist. He could not have used the medium just because he «enjoyed it». The dream convention must have been purposefully and intentionally used to give the elegy, its identity and significance. Nevil Coghill says that in this poem

«the courtier and rhetor had put forth all his young art for his patron and sometime patroness». (28)

But the whole poem is not cast in the dream convention; it starts with reality and ends at the same point from which it started : the dream comes half-way in the development of the whole poem. At the beginning we are introduced to the narrator, who, tired and exhausted for lack of sleep, wonders how he has been living thus for eight years. He takes a book and starts to read inviting sleep, and the story he reads turns out to be that of King Ceyx and Queen Alcione. (29) It is told succinctly and to the point in a very terse style, with no use of rhetorical or figurative language. Chaucer has condensed Ovid's incident of 200 ll. to 15 ll. He does not slavishly imitate Ovid but uses incident for his own purpose — to emphasise married love and married devotion. The dialogue is short and the style is naturalistic :

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(27) Op. Cit., LeLis, p. 168.

(28) N. Coghill, *Geoffery Chaucer*, Longmans, Green & Co., London 1956, p. 29.

(29) The story of Alcione & Cyex is taken from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, XI.

«This messenger com fleynge faste  
And cried, «O, ho : awake anon.»  
Hit was for noght : there herde hym non.  
«Awake» quod he, «whoo ys lyth there ?»  
And blew his horn ryght in here eere,  
And cried «Awaketh» wonder hye.»

11. 178—183 (30)

This story is an appropriate introduction to the vision that is to follow. It provides the atmosphere and the mood of the main part of the poem (31) — the awe, sorrow and bereavement which is expressed in the last line of the narrative.

«To lytel while oure blysse lasteth.»

1. 211

In line 291, the dream starts in its very conventional manner and setting : it is the month of May, the Spring season with its vivacity and vitality. The vision is set in the conventional courtly vein of the *Romance of the Rose* and this justifies Lewis's comment that Chaucer was a «faithful disciple of the Rose tradition». (32) But the detailed description of natural life in the dream gives us the impression that we are listening to a description of something that really happened. This lends an air of reality to the dream : for I was waked

«With smale foules a gret hep  
That had affrayed me out of my slep,  
Thorgh noyse and swetnesse of her song.  
And, as me mette, they sate among  
Upon my chambre roof wythoute,  
Upon the tyles, oweral aboute,  
And songen, everych in bys wyse,  
The moste solempne servise  
By noote, that ever man, y trowe,  
Had herd ; for som of hem song lowe,  
Som high, and al of oon acord.»

11. 294 — 305

(30) Op. Cit., Robinson, p. 269.

(31) See also : Newstead, H. e(d) *Chaucer & His Contemporaries, Essays on Medieval Literature and Thought*, Fawcett publications, Greenwich, Conn., 1968, p. 129.

(32) Op. Cit., Lewis, p. 168.

In the forest scene we get details that would turn the dream real ; (33) but it is always an ideal description, a literary nature. (34) Chaucer is not a «nature» poet although he possesses an exquisite sensibility to sensuous beauty. The whelp (35) is described in a realistic naturalistic manner but it quickly vanishes as is bound to happen in a dream. It is worthwhile noting that in these descriptions Chaucer gave great attention to the sense of colour and the sense of movement. We do not get a static image of the hunt, but one vibrating with the pulse of life. Then, the «Man in Black» is found singing his set in song in contrast to all the movement around him and he starts to talk with the dreamer. Here we have two characters that have replaced the personified abstractions of *The Romance of The Rose*. The dreamer intrigues the knight in the dialogue which is the main objective of Chaucer, because it is through speech that the consolation will be achieved. The dialogues are long and have been accused by Legouis of being «loose verbosity, the matter too often diluted and there are many repetitions.» (36) Again, I think, this extension is deliberate and serves the elegiac purpose of the poem C.S. Lewis says on this occasion that

«Chaucer tries : to show dramatically in his dialogue the impatient self absorption of grief on the part of the lover, and his demand on the dreamer's close attention. But he does this so clumsily that he sometimes makes the one seem a bore, and the other a fool, thus producing comic effects which are disastrous, and which were certainly not intended.» (37)

To this statement, I strongly object. First, the dreamer is not a fool. The apparent naivete, lack of understanding, inquisitiveness, and child-like attitude is part of his dramatic character. He is not stupid but his assumed stupidity is a scheme that leads the knight to unfold his sorrow gradually till he reaches the pivot of the whole movement. The allegory within allegory of Fortune and the game of chess is another device to induce the knight to speak out. The loss of «fers» is symbolic and the repetition of :

«thou wost full lytel what thou menest I have lost more than  
thou wenest;»

11. 742, 3

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(33) See also : Op. cit., Kean, p. 7.

(34) Op. cit., Hussey, p. 214.

(35) 11. 389 — 396 — the whelp itself is borrowed in every detail from a French poem.

(36) Op. cit., Legouis p. 159. In opposition to this view, see what Kean says in praising the range and flexibility of Chaucer's use of dialogue : Op. cit., Kean, pp. 14 & 15.

(37) Op. cit., Lewis, p. 170.

is intentional and allows the knight to talk more and more unravelling his sorrow. Similarly, the knight is not a «bore» — the lengthy description of past joys relieves him of his present sorrows. Moreover, the love of the «Man in Black» is set in the courtly — love convention and accordingly proceeds to describe his service to God Amor, his courtship of Lady white, his primary refusal, his suffering and his final acceptance within the framework of the convention and by its terminology. The use of this convention raises a point of weakness in the elegy which laments the death of a faithful wife because the love of the knight and Lady white is not a wedded love, though the writer has idealized that love. (38) This incongruity might find a plausible solution in Coghill's comment that

«Chaucer had swallowed the dream — allegories of France and the philosophy of courtly love in long draughts from *the Romance of the Rose*, the *Fontaine Amoureuse*, the *jugement du Roi de Behaingne* ... and he was trying to do extreme honour to this ordinary Christian marriage by representing it as an idealized amour :» (39)

In other words, Chaucer, to get the highest effect, tried to raise this normal love of husband and wife to an idealized amour.

Finally through the interplay of the apparently simple dreamer and the knight adept in the courtly conventions Chaucer leads us to the climax of the whole work of art; «she was dead». Nothing can be said after this final decisive ending. The long dialogue was building up towards this culmination; and from this point we are carried back to reality and the poem circles back to its starting point. (40) the clock strikes twelve, the dreamer awakes with the book in his hand and finally decides to :

«put this sweven in ryme»

### Conclusion

The analysis of the *Parliament of Fowls* and the *Book of the Duchess* has proved that these two poems are far from being loosely constructed, incoherent or inorganic. This assessment is based on the fact that each poem is motivated by one single theme and objective that was

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(38) - See also : Op. cit., H. Newstead, P. 141.

(39) Op. cit., Coghill, p. 36.

(40) Op. cit., Newstead, p. 170.

achieved through the adaptation of diverse materials and techniques. The diversity in itself is an expression of that meaning and the structure of each poem is the fit pattern for it. The two cannot be isolated.

In the *Parliament of Fowls*, «commune profyte» or «selflese love» is expressed through a representation of varying types of love. The treatment of the idea in a variety of ways and through contrast makes the poem seem apparently disconnected. The subtle genuine irony arises from the successive contrasts leading up to the final contrast in the assembly between natural love and the artificiality adopted by the servants of the God of Love — between nature love and the sophisticated pattern of courtly conventions. Through the theme we can trace an inherent pattern, a pattern built on contrasts that give unity to the apparent discord. What has been taken for disunity is an expression of its meaning : the diverse elements are «an entire spectrum of varying types of love» which is the theme of the whole poem.

The *Book of the Duchess* is also a web of borrowings and variations on love conventions; but through the manipulation of the diverse material Chaucer has achieved his aim which is not tears and sorrow, as the aim of any traditional elegy would be, but consolation and relief. (41) As a matter of fact, this consolation is offered at the beginning of the poem, summed up in the proverb at the end of the Ceyx and Alcione story. But Chaucer, the artist and rhetorician expanded the idea through different means : the use of the dream vision and the courtly love convention, descriptions, catalogues, contrasts allegory and the lengthy dialogue which wound the poem up to a highly effective ending. Furthermore, the common emotional situation of the narrator, Alcione and the Black Knight serves as a unifying element. This sense of deprivation in the three characters heightens the effect of the consolation and adds to its meaning, especially that they are all subject to the «lawe of Kynde» that governs and directs all the universe. It is that «lawe of Kynde» or «Nature» that makes :

«To lytel while oure blysse lasteth».

The poem that started as an elegy has been skilfully and elaborately developed to display an ultimate truth that tells us : such is the law of nature — with its moments of happiness and unhappiness, its diversities and contrasts. And as all great works of art, *the Book of The*

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(41) A persuasive argument is presented by professor J. Lawlor in «The pattern of Consolation in The Book of The Duchess», *Speculum*, XXXI 1956, pp. 626—648.

*Duchess* as well as the *Parliament of Fowls* have reflected that diversity, each according to its own theme and within its own pattern that is identical with its meaning.

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