

PARLIAMENT OF FOWLS

¶ Here follows *The Parliament of Fowls*, a very pleasant and quick read, assembled by the worthy and famous writer, Geoffrey Chaucer.

[Figure: Medieval scribe with a distracted air sitting in his scriptorium, manuscript in hand]

ROBERT COPELAND, publisher of the latest trends.

News, news, news, news—do you have you any news?
My ears long for you to call out and cry!
Are books made from airy whistling and whews?
Are there not yet enough for your fancy?
I don't think so, and yet we hear daily
of sad stories including apes and owls.
But for your greater pleasure this will I
let you hear in *The Parliament of Fowls*.

CHAUCER is dead, who had this pamphlet wrate,
as are the followers in his business.
Gone also is the famous clerk LYDGATE,
as well as young HAWES: God their souls address.
They made so many tomes, both more and less,
their books pile up until the leather yowls.
But for your minds, this book I will impress
whose title is *The Parliament of Fowls*.

Many learned (at least they say they be)
were never seen doing so few good works.
Where goes the time that they now spend: think ye
in saying prayers? And where? in fields and parks?
So then what has happened to all the clerks?
'T' seems sloth and idleness their time befools.
For lack of writing that has moral sparks,
I must imprint *The Parliament of Fowls*.

Dittees and letters I can make myself:
enough of such are daily to me brought.
Old moral books stand still upon the shelf:
I am afraid they will never be bought.
Trifles and toys: these are the things much sought,
their humour rolling like those Flemish bowls.
Yet gentle clerks follow, in every thought,
the author of *The Parliament of Fowls*.

The End

Prologue

Life is so short, it takes so long to learn,
the tests so hard, so steep in conquering,
not'th'easy joy for which I'd always yearn.
I say all this of Love, for my feeling
is astonished by his dreadful working;
of course, I'm sore when I about him think,
since I'm not sure whether I float or sink.

ii

It may be that I know not Love indeed
nor know how he repays folk for their hire,
yet I often in books happen to read 10
about his miracles and his cruel ire:
there it is clear he will be lord and sire.
I dare not say that his strokes are so sore:
save me from such a lord—I say no more.

iii

What customs were, from lust as well as lore,
I often read in books, as I you told.
But why did I not say all this before?
Again, it happened that I did behold
a book that was written in letters old. 20
I wanted there a certain thing to learn,
so I read fast all day while I did yearn.

iv

For out of old fields, as men tend to say,
comes all the new corn grown from year to year.
And out of old books, reading every day,
comes all the new knowledge that men hold dear.
But to make the first matter very clear,
reading began to give me such delight
that all day long it led me like a light.

v

The book of which I did just make mention
had a title that I shall you now tell: 30
Tullius on the dream of Scipion.

It had seven chapters of heav'n and hell,
of earth and of the souls that therein dwell,
about which I'm now going to present,
in which I will describe his whole intent.

vi

First it tells how Scipio did arrive
in Africa, how he met Masiniss',
how joy them into an embrace did drive.
Then he told in his speech of all the bliss 40
between them till daylight began to miss,
and how his elder, Affrican so dear,
did in his sleep the night before appear.

vii

¶ Then he told him how, from a starry place,
Affrican to him Carthage pointed out,
and warned him of his future loss of grace;
he told him that a man, learnèd or lout,
who loved communal welfare well planned out,
would always to a blissful place then wend
where joy is everlasting without end.

viii

Then he asked if the folk here who were dead 50
had life and dwelling in another place,
and Affrican said "Yes, without a dread;"
and that our present world's living space
was a manner of death that we all trace;
and righteous folks would go—after they die—
to heaven, and showed him our Galaxy.

ix

¶ Then he showed him the little Earth that is
so small compared to heaven's quantity;
after that he pointed out the nine spheres
and, later on, the melody heard he 60
that emanates from the same spheres thrice three:
the source of music and of melody
in this w'rld, and the source of harmony.

x

¶ Then he told him, since the Earth was so slight
and so full of torment and of hard grace,
that he should in this world not take delight.
He told him that, in several years' space,
each star would come back to the very place
where it first was; no one would then pay mind
to what had ever been done by mankind. 70

xi

¶ Then he prayed Scipio to tell him all
the ways and means to achieve heav'nly bliss.
He said, "First know that you are immortal.
Ensure you work hard and remain selfless
to reach the common good and you'll not miss
arriving swiftly at that place so dear,
which is so full of bliss and souls so clear.

xii

¶ "But breakers of the law, I'll say again,
and lecherous folk, after they are dead,
will whirl around the Earth, always in pain, 80
till many'a world has long passed beyond dread;
but then, forgiven for each wicked deed,
they will soon arrive at that blissful place
where all who come receive God's loving grace."

xiii

The day began to fail and the dark night,
which steals creatures away from their business,
robbed me of my own book for lack of light,
and so for bed I then began to dress,
filled full of thought and drowsy heaviness,
for I now had the thing I wanted not, 90
and I had not the thing for which I'd sought.

xiv

But in the end my spirit finally,
weary from having laboured the whole day,
took the deep rest that made me sleep soundly.
During my sleep I dreamt that as I lay
how Affrican, in that self-same array
as Scipio'd seen him before that tide,
had come and was standing at my bedside.

xv

The weary hunter, sleeping in his bed,
again to the woods in his mind now goes; 100
the judge dreams how his caseload will be sped;
the carter dreams about his cart's cargoes;
the rich of gold; the knight fights with his foes;
the sick man dreams he drinks out of a tun;
the lover dreams he has his lady won.

xvi

What the cause was, I cannot now declare
(although Affrican's writings me did warn)
what made me dream that he was standing there.
But he said, "You have yourself so well borne
in looking through my old book, now quite torn, 110
(and which did not Macrobius excite)
that some of your hard work I would requite."

The Invocation

¶ Goddess of Love, joyful lady supreme,
who with your bright sword tames those whom you test
and produces this vision in my dream:
be you my help in this, as you do best,
as clearly as I saw you north-north-west
when I began my vision down to write.
Let me record and rhyme it with your might!

The Dream

THEN Affrican (as if I were his son) 120
took me with him and to a gate me brought,
ope'ning into a park walled by green stone.
And over this gate in large letters wrought
there were written verses that, to my thought,
on front and back showed a great difference:
of this difference, I'll now try to make sense.

2

“Through me, men go into that peaceful place
where hearts can heal and deadly wounds can cure.
Through me men go unto the Well of Grace:
there green and lusty May shall e'er endure; 130
this is the way to all good adventure.
Be glad, reader, and your sorrows off cast.
I am open; enter, but do it fast.”

3

“Men go through me,” then said the other side,
“toward the death-dealing stroke of the spear,
which both Disdain and Danger it will guide;
there trees will ne'er either fruit or leaves bear.
This stream leads you to the unhappy weir,
which—like fish trapped in jail—you will find dry;
avoiding it's the only remedy.” 140

4

¶ In gold and black these verses written were,
and did make me astounded to behold,
for the one did greatly increase my fear
and the other made my heart become bold.
One made me hot; the other made me cold.
I simply did not know which I should choose:
enter or flee; to save myself or lose.

5

¶ As if I had between strong magnets, two
of equal strength, a piece of iron set,
unable either one to attach to, 150
for what one pulled the other would not let.
So I dithered not knowing what was be't—
to come or go—till Affrican my guide
took me and shoved me through these gates so wide.

6

¶ He said, "It's plainly written on your face
(your quand'ry) though you tell it not to me;
but do not dread coming into this place,
for those words don't apply to you, you see,
unless, of course, you would Love's servant be.
For you have lost your taste for love, I guess, 160
as the sick have for sweets and bitterness.

7

¶ Nevertheless, though you may be shallow
so that you can't yet do what may you see,
for many'a man can't help being brought low
yet still wants at the wrestling match to be
and swears he would beat the other party.
So if you have the talent to indite
I will show you about what you can write."

8

¶ With that, he took my hand in his awhile
from which I comfort caught and entered fast; 170
Lord, I was glad; the scene did me beguile,
for everywhere that I my eyes did cast
were trees with leaves that would forever last,
each in its kind, with colours fresh and green,
like emeralds that were joys to be seen.

9

¶ The builder's oak as well as hardy ash;
 the stately elm, coffins for our remain';
 boxtree for pipes; holly for the whip's lash;
 the fir for masts; cypress to mourn death's pain;
 yew for our bows; aspen for arrows plain; 180
 the olive for peace; wine from the grapevine;
 the victor's palm; the laurel to divine.

10

¶ I saw a garden full of blossomed boughs
 along a river in a green meadow,
 where sweetness it eternally does douse,
 strewn with flowers red, blue, white and yellow,
 and where the cold well-streams never run slow,
 all full of little fishes swimming light,
 with reddish fins and scales of silver bright.

11

¶ On every bough I did hear the birds sing 190
 with angel voices in their harmony;
 some were busy their nestlings out to bring.
 The little rabbits to their play did hie,
 and all around I began to espy
 nervous roe deer, roebuck, red deer and hind,
 squirrels and small beasts of the dearest kind.

12

On stringèd instruments, all in accord,
 I heard such play and ravishing sweetness
 that God, who is maker of all and Lord,
 will never have heard better, is my guess. 200
 And then a wind—or it might have been less—
 made in the green leaves a melody soft
 that harmonized with the fowls' song aloft.

13

The air of that place so moderate was
 that none ever complained of hot or cold;
 there grew every edible spice and grass;
 no one was allowed to grow sick or old,
 yet joy flourished more than a thousandfold
 than any man could tell; there was no night,
 only clear day to give everyone light. 210

14

Under a tree beside a well, I say,
 Lord Cupid did his arrows forge and file
 and, at his feet, his bow all ready lay.
 And Will, his daughter, tempered all the while
 th'arrowheads in water and, with some guile,
 she set them up for whom they would them use:
 some they would slay, and some they'd cut or bruise.

15

Then I became aware of Pleasure on my right
 and, too, of Dress, Desire and Courtesy,
 and of the Cunning that gives one the might 220
 to force a person to commit folly.
 I had made her ugly, I will not lie;
 then by himself, under an oak, I guess,
 I saw Delight stand next to Gentleness.

16

I saw beauty without any attire
 and youth quite full of game and jollity,
 Foolhardiness, Flattery and Desire,
 Messagery, Reward, another three—
 their names shall here not be mentioned by me.
 And upon great pillars of jasper long, 230
 I saw a temple of brass, founded strong.

17

Around the temple dancing the whole day,
there were many women, some of whom were
most fair, and some of whom dressed up all gay
in their fine skirts and with their flying hair:
that was their sole duty, year after year.
And on the temple I saw, white and fair,
doves sitting in many'a hundred pair.

18

Before the temple door most soberly,
Dame Peace sat with a curtain in her hand, 240
and close to her, with wonderful bounty,
I found Dame Patience sitting on the strand
with a pale face upon a hill of sand.
And everywhere around them were allowed
Promise and Skill, and of their kind, a crowd.

19

In the temple I heard sighs hot as fire,
and the sound began all around to turn.
These sighs were caused by feelings of desire
that started making every altar burn
with a new flame; and then I did discern 250
that the sorrows they suffered inwardly
came from the bitter goddess, Jealousy.

20

¶ I saw Priapus' statue as I went,
in the prime place within the temple stand;
he was clad as when the ass him had sent
crying into the night, his wand in hand.
Attendants worked on his head there to band
bouquets from the garden, of sundry hew,
with garlands full of flowers, fresh and new.

21

¶ And in a private corner in disport, 260
I found Venus and her porter, Riches;
she was noble and proud of her deport'.
Dark was that place, and later of lightness
I saw little—probably even less.
There on a bed of gold she lay to rest
until the hot sun declined in the west.

22

¶ Woven into her gold hair was a thread,
also of gold, left unbound as she lay.
Uncovered from her breast up to her head,
one could view her, but I must truly say 270
her covered torso one could not survey
thanks to a silk veil cov'ring from Valence:
there was no thicker cloth for her defence.

23

¶ The place gave off a thousand fragrances
and Bacchus, god of wine, sat her beside
and Ceres next, who did help hunger cease
and, as I said, amidst them lay Cupid,
to whom two young folk on their knees then cried
to come to their aid, but I let her lie
and further into the temple did spy. 280

24

In anger against Diana the chaste,
many'a broken bow hung on the wall
by maidens who thought they their time did waste
in her service; and painted over all
were lovers' stories, some of which I shall
mention like At'lanta and Callisto,
and maids of which the names I do not know.

25

Semiramis, Candace and Hercules,
Byblis, Dido, Thisbe and Pyramus,
Tristan, Isold', Paris and Achilles, 290
Helen and Cleopatra and Troilus
Scylla and the mother of Romulus.
All these were painted on the other side:
their love stories, and in what plight they died.

26

When I did come again unto the place
that I spoke of, which was so sweet and green,
I then walked out to give myself solace.
Then I became aware there sat a queen
who, just as the summer sun's light's so keen
it dims the stars, so beyond all measure, 300
she was more fair than any one creature.

27

And in a dell, upon a hill of flow'rs,
there sat the noble goddess of Nature;
branches did form her halls and her bowers
according to her craft and her measure.
And all the fowls that she did engender
were noisily awaiting her presence
to hear their fates, and give her audience.

28

For this happened on Saint Valentine's Day
when every fowl comes here its mate to take 310
from among every kind that one think may.
And they began such a huge noise to make,
that Earth and sea, and every tree and lake
became so full, there was almost no space
for me to stand, so full was the whole place.

29

And just as Alan in his *Plaint of Kind*
imagines Nature with such garb and face
that those who looked in them would her there find,
this noble empress—always full of grace—
told each and every fowl to take its place 320
as they would always do from year to year
on Saint Valentine's Day, and there t'adhere.

30

Now it is true to say the birds of prey
were highest set; below, the smaller fowl
who would then eat (as that was Nature's way)
earthworms and things of which I do not tell.
The waterfowls sat lowest in the dell,
and fowls that lived on seed sat on the green,
so many, 'twas a wonder to be seen.

31

That's where the royal eagle one might find 330
who with its sharp gaze can look in the sun,
as well as eagles of a lesser kind
of which poets have many stories spun.
There was the tyrant with its feathers dun
and green (the goshawk) who itself does preen
for killing birds with its extreme rapine.

32

The noble falcon whose talons take hold
of the king's arm; the sparrowhawk also,
the foe of quails; the merlin that's so bold
and will constantly after the lark go; 340
there was the dove that does its meek eyes show;
the jealous swan that to'ard its own death sings;
the owl, too, that of death the message brings.

33

¶ The crane, the giant with the trumpet soun';
 that thief, the chough; the chattering magpie;
 the scornful jay; the eel's foe, the heron;
 the subtle lapwing, full of treachery;
 the starling that shares secrets openly;
 the tame robin, and the cowardly kite;
 the cock that sounds a hamlet's morning light. 350

34

The sparrow, Venus' son; the nightingale,
 whose call does summon up all green leaves new;
 the swallow, killer on the honey trail
 of bees flying to flowers fresh of hew;
 the wedded turtledove with its heart true;
 the peacock with its angel feathers bright;
 the pheasant, scorner of the cock by night.

35

The watchful goose; the cuckoo e'er unkind;
 the parrot, lover of delicacy;
 the drake, the destroyer of his own kind; 360
 the stork, assassin of adultery;
 the cormorant of greedy gluttony;
 the wise raven; the crow with voice of care;
 the ancient thrush; the cold-weather fieldfare.

36

What should I say? Of the fowls every kind
 that in this world have feathers and stature,
 one might all in that place assembled find
 before that noble goddess of Nature.
 And each of them did busily make sure
 most carefully to choose or designate, 370
 with her accord, his she-eagle or mate.

37

But to the point: Nature held on her hand
a she-eagle, her form the most noble
of all the works that Nature there let stand.
Most courteous as well as beautiful,
she embodied all virtues wonderful—
so much, that e'en Nature herself had bliss
looking at her, and oft' her beak did kiss.

38

Nature, the agent of th'Almighty Lord,
who did hot, cold, heavy, light, moist and dry 380
join up in even numbers of accord,
in a calm voice began to speak and say,
“Fowls, pay attention to my words, I pray,
and to help you in achieving your need,
as fast as I can speak, I will you speed.

39

“You know well how on Saint Valentine's Day,
by my statute and through my governance,
you come to choose—and then fly on your way—
your new mates, as I your pleasure advance.
But nonetheless, my rightful ordinance 390
I may not break and let all these fowls win,
until he who's most worthy does begin.

40

“The male eagle that you all know so well,
the royal fowl, above you in degree,
the wise and worthy, careful, true as steel,
which I have formed, as you now do well see,
in every way as it does best suit me—
you know his shape so I won't it portray—
he shall choose first and speak in his own way.

41

“And after him, in order, you shall choose 400
after your kind, each one as you would like,
and as your luck is, you shall win or lose.
But which of you whom Love then most does strike,
God send him her who finds him most dreamlike.”
And therewithal, the eagle she did call
and said, “My son, the choice to you does fall.

42

“But nonetheless, I have a condition
that it be the choice of each male who’s here,
and that she agree to her selection
by him who would like to be her compeer. 410
This is our tradition from year to year,
and whoso at this time does find his luck
is fortunate in having this place struck.”

43

With head inclined and the most humble cheer,
the royal eagle spoke and dawdled not.
“Unto my sovereign lady, and not my peer,
I chose and choose with will and heart and thought
the eagle now on your hand, so well wrought,
whose all I am, and whom I’ll ay be nigh,
do what she wants to make me live or die. 420

44

“I beseech her for mercy and for grace
because she is my lady sovereign—
or let me now die at once in this place.
Of course, I might not live long with this pain,
for in my heart has been cut every vein.
With regard only to my faithfulness,
dear heart, for my woe have some tenderness.

45

“And if I should be found to her untrue,
deceitful or willfully negligent,
a boaster, or in time do love anew, 430
I pray to you that this be my judgment:
that by these fowls I will be apart rent,
if any day that she may ever find
I am untrue, or in my guilt, unkind.

46

“And since none has loved her as well as me—
though she never pledged my love to return—
then she should be mine out of sheer mercy,
for no other bond can I from her earn.
No, I won’t ever let myself her spurn;
I’ll serve her however far she does wend. 440
Say what you will: my tale is at an end.”

47

As it happens when a fresh red rose new
in summer sunshine then more coloured is,
her sheer embarrassment deepened the hue
of the she-eagle when she heard all this.
She neither answered well nor said amiss,
so self-conscious was she, until Nature
said, “Daughter, fear not, let me you assure.”

48

A lower kind of eagle then talked on,
saying, “I cannot allow that to be! 450
I love her more than you, by good Saint John;
or at least we do love her equally,
but I’ve served her longer in my degree.
And if she shall have loved from long loving,
it’s me that you should now be rewarding.

49

“I dare say that if she finds me untrue,
unkind, prattler, or rebel in some guise,
or jealousy causes my life t’undo,
and if I do not toil in her service,
and if my wits do not for her suffice 460
in every way that will her honour save,
take she my life and all the goods I have.”

50

The third male eagle then did carry on:
“Now sirs, you’ve had a little respite here.
But every fowl now cries out to be gone
off with his mate or with his lady dear;
and Nature herself, also, will not hear
of stopping here, not half of what I’d cry;
if I don’t speak, I might from sorrow die.

51

“Of long service I don’t boast anything 470
but it might be that I could die today
from woe as one who has been languishing
these twenty winters, and well happen may.
Someone may serve better with greater sway
in half a year, although it may last less
than someone who’s long served with doggedness.

52

“I don’t say this for myself, for I can
do no service that may my lady please;
but I dare say I am her truest man
as I judge things, and would her gladly ease. 480
In a few words, until death does me seize,
I will be hers whether I wake or wink,
and true in all that the heart may bethink.”

53

In my whole life, since the day I was born,
 such noble pleas in love or anything,
 no one had ever heard such things so sworn.
 None but those with the leisure and cunning
 could reflect on their deeds and their speaking;
 and from the morning on did their speech last
 until the sun went down wondrously fast. 490

54

The noise of the fowls anxious to be depart
 rang very loud: "Have done, and let us go!"
 I thought all the woods had splintered apart.
 "Let's go!" they cried, "or you'll ruin us so.
 What does your cursèd pleading us now show?
 How can a judge either party believe,
 if he did not the evidence receive?"

55

The goose, the cuckoo and the duck also
 then cried: "Kekek, cuckoo, quack quack," so loud
 that the noises right through my ears did blow. 500
 The goose said, "None of this should be allowed,
 but I'll find out how to come out unbowed,
 and I'll pronounce my verdict clear and fair
 on waterfowl, happy or in despair."

56

"And I for worm-fowl," said the mad cuckoo,
 "for I will, on my own authority,
 for the common good, take on that load now,
 because to save all is great charity."
 "You may go on longer (more's the pity),"
 said turtledove, "but if I had my will, 510
 someone who's speaking should rather be still."

57

“I’m a seed-fowl, one of th’unworthiest
and, it’s true, with not much understanding,
but it’s better that that fowl tongue should rest
than to impose on us with such talking,
about which he can neither read nor sing:
whoever does a full fowl overstuff
is unfitting for office, sure enough.”

58

Nature, who did always cock a sharp ear
for the mutter of the grumblers behind, 520
in a polished voice said, “Hold your tongues there,
and I shall soon, I hope, a counsel find
who’ll let you go and from this noise unbind.
I ask from every flock that you one call
who’ll pronounce the verdict of you fowls all.”

59

Then well accepted was this conclusion
by all the birds; and now the fowls of prey
did first choose by a simple election
a male member of the falcons to say
his verdict which they asked him to relay 530
to Dame Nature, to whom he did present,
and she accepted it with glad intent.

60

The male eagle then said in this manner:
“It is quite hard to prove using reason
who did this gentle female love best here,
for everyone will have an opinion
but none has evidence to take this on.
I can’t see how arguments will avail,
so it now seems there must be a battle.”

61

“All ready,” said the male eagles as one. 540
“No, sirs,” said he, “If I dare so to say,
you do me wrong: my tale is not yet done.
And so, sirs, do not take offense, I pray.
It may not go as you would like this way;
ours is the voice that has the charge in hand,
but to the judges’ verdict you must stand.

62

“And therefore, peace, I say. As for my wit,
it would seem to me who the worthiest
knight would be: he who’d longest practiced it;
in wealth the richest; in blood the noblest. 550
All are open to her for her to test.
And of these three, she knows it already
who that will be, for that’s easy to see.”

63

The waterfowls their heads together laid,
and after a limited argument,
in which each had an ample mouthful said,
they all said, to be sure, with one assent,
how the goose, in her way grandiloquent,
“Whoso desires to vocalize our need
will tell our tale,” and all prayed her Godspeed. 560

64

And for these waterfowls then began
the goose to speak and in her cackling,
she said, “Peace, pay attention every man,
and listen to what reason I shall bring:
my wit is sharp, I don’t like dawdling.
I’ll tell him as if he were my brother,
lest she loves him, let him love another.”

65

“See, that’s the perfect reas’ning of a goose,”
said the sparrowhawk, “Thrive, but never she!
See what can happen when your tongue is loose. 570
Now, by God, fool, it would much better be
to hold your peace than to show your folly.
It lies not in his wit nor in his will
but the truth is: ‘a fool cannot be still’.”

66

Laughter arose from the noble fowls all,
and right away, the seed-fowls did select
the turtledove and did her to them call,
asking her most soberly to reflect
on this, and to tell them whom she’d elect.
Then she answered that, plainly, her intent 580
she’d show, and what she truly by that meant.

67

“Now God forbid that a lover should stray!”
the turtledove said, reddening with shame.
“His lady might always seem far away;
yet let him serve her till death does him claim,
so I don’t praise what the goose did proclaim.
For though she died, I’d have no other mate:
I would be hers till death had sealed my fate.”

68

“Well bantered,” said the duck, “this tit for tat,
that men can’t seem to love without prodding! 590
Who can find the merit or wit in that?
Will he dance merrily who is mirthless?
Should I care for someone who is careless?”
“You quack,” then said the goose full well and fair,
“There are more stars, God knows, than just this pair.”

69

“Peasant!” now said the noble male falcon.
“The dunghill will give you that kind of sight.
You cannot see what you’ve stumbled upon.
You deal with love as owls do the light:
daylight blinds them, but they can see at night. 600
Your kind is of such a low wretchedness
that what love is, you cannot see or guess.”

70

Then did the cuckoo himself forward press
and spoke for all the fowls that on worms thrive:
“As long as I can have my mate in peace,
I don’t care how long you together strive;
may you all stay single while you’re alive.
They may not with my suggestion accord,
so this brief lesson please do not record.”

71

“So, has the glutton enough filled his paunch? 610
Well then, we are content!” said the merlin.
“You murderer of dunnocks on the branch,
who brought you up, you pathetic glutton?
May you live all alone, worms’ corruption,
for pride is not lacking in your nature.
Go, play the fool while your life does endure.”

72

“Now peace,” said Nature, “I am in charge here.
I have now heard everyone’s opinion
and, in effect, we are not even near.
But finally, this is my conclusion: 620
that all women shall have the election
of whom they may desire, moody or gay;
they will then have men whom they choose today.

73

“For since it may not here decided be,
as the male falcon said, whose love she’ll get,
then I’ll do this favour for her, that she
shall have the one on whom her heart is set,
and he on whom his heart casts its love-net.
I, Nature, so judge, for I may not lie;
to no other have I given an eye. 630

74

“But as for advice on choosing a mate,
if I now spoke as Reason, then would I
the male royal eagle the highest rate,
as the male eagle also said aptly.
As for the noblest and the most worthy,
I have made him so great to my delight:
that ought to give you sufficient insight.”

75

Shyly, the she-eagle her then replied,
“My rightful lady, goddess of Nature,
the truth is that I under you abide 640
just like every other living creature
and must be yours while my life does endure.
Therefore, grant me my very first favour,
and my choice I will soon to you render.

76

“I grant it you,” said she. Then quickly asked
the she-eagle, speaking most modestly,
“Almighty queen, until this year has passed,
I ask respite to reflect properly
and, after that, to have my choice held free.
All this and some I will say by and by: 650
you’ll get no more, ev’n if you make me die.

77

“I won’t serve either Cupid or Venus
as yet, indeed, and not in any way.”
“Since it may for no-one else cause a fuss,”
said Nature, “there is nothing more to say
than wishing that these fowls had gone away,
each with his mate, no longer ling’ring here,”
and told them so as you shall after hear.

78

“I speak to you, young falcons,” said Nature.
“Be of good heart and be helpful, all three. 660
A year is not so long for you t’endure
and each of you will try, in his degree,
to do well, God knows, for she will be free
from you this year; whatso after befall
this interlude will benefit you all.

79

And when this work was thus brought to an end,
to every fowl Nature gave each their mate
by mutual accord and on their way did send.
And Lord, the bliss and joy they did create!
Their wings with one another they did plait 670
and their necks ’round each other they did wind
while thanking the noble goddess of Kind.

80

But first, there were chosen fowls that would sing,
as year by year was always their habit
to sing a rondel at their departing
in honour of Nature, as was most fit.
The tune was French, as I remember it,
the words were such as one here tends to find,
as in the next line that I have in mind:

¶ *Whoso loves well, forgets slowly.*

81

All the shouting when their song had ended 680
(the kind fowls tend to make flying away)
woke me, and other books me befriended,
which I would read, and yet my thoughts would stray,
hoping that I would read something one day
that would let me dream so richly again,
and thus from reading I will not refrain.

¶ Thus ends the Parliament of Fowls on
Saint Valentine's Day.

¶ The envoi of Robert Copeland, publisher.

L YING on the shelf, your pages all torn
with faint letters, almost as if wiped clean,
your cover rotten, by worms all through borne,
you lay there, 'twas a pity to be seen,
bound up in fours, from age all gray and green
your words asleep because of your absence;
but now that you're free, show off your sentence.

ii

While you are restructuring your language,
your printer will offset the faults you have,
preventing you from ruinous damage
with snow white paper all your thoughts to save,
in the same language that Chaucer you gave
but with new terms and sentences made new,
if not sweeter: who can his mind now view?

iii

And if a lover happens you to read,
don't mind the goose speaking his coarse sentence
to th'turtledove and do not pay them heed;
those whose love lessens gives true love offence.
To my mind, love's the flow'r of excellence,
but love's also a source of wretchedness:
that's how love is, as your work bears witness.

¶ The End.

¶ Printed in London in Fleet Street at the sign of the
Sun next to the public fountain by me, Wynkyn de
Worde. The 24th day of January, in the year of our
Lord, 1530.

©2018 by Dirk Jol.