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Chaucer's Dream Visions and the Mystical Traditions of Islam

By

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A thesis

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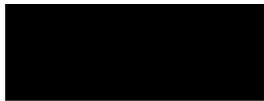
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Dedication Page

To my loving husband

Chaucer and the Mystical Traditions of Islam

Natalie Mahmassani

Abstract

Dreaming is a form of sleeping experience that simulates waking experience: it occupies the whole field of consciousness and is extended in the dimensions of space and time; but it has a number of characteristics that differentiate it from being awake. Though sometimes extremely vivid, dreaming is in general elusive, and less easily remembered than waking experience. Further, it is not under the control of our conscious will: we cannot decide whether to dream or what to dream, and when dreaming we seem to be less in command of what happens than in waking life. Two features of dreaming have relevance here, the use of dreams as frames for or events in fictional narratives. First, dreaming feels charged with significance: unlike events in waking life, nothing in a dream seems to be trivial or unimportant. Second, dreaming does not make sense in the same way as waking life (Spearing).

I believe the connection between Chaucer's dream visions and the mystical/Sufi way of looking at dreams can be made because of the similarities between the two. Chaucer was writing at a time when the Church had strong influence and therefore his writing had a moral vein running throughout, as well as a satirical aspect that mocked issues/people that he didn't necessarily approve of. It is my intention to show that by using a mystical/Sufi approach to his dream visions that Chaucer's dream visions had a moral religious vein (rather than an attitude that promoted Church obedience) that was more dominant than what meets the eye. This connection is worthwhile because it will provide my readers with a new way of looking

at, and analyzing, Chaucer's dream visions and in this way, provide new interpretations and meanings to be considered. I intend to do this by looking at each of Chaucer's dream visions and their more orthodox interpretation, followed by looking at some examples of Eastern literature and their accepted interpretation. After this, I intend to examine the common elements between the two areas and see how they can both be examined from a mystical/Sufi point of view.

Keywords: Chaucer, Sufism, Dreams, Attar, Hafiz

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Introduction

Geoffrey Chaucer (c.1343-1400) was known as the father of English literature and is widely considered the greatest English poet of the Middle Ages. He was also the first poet to have been buried in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey. As well as achieving fame as an author, alchemist, philosopher, and astronomer, Chaucer had an active career as a bureaucrat, courtier and diplomat. His many works include dream visions, two of which are, *The Book of the Duchess* (1368) and *The Parliament of Fowls* (1382). Chaucer was writing at a time when the Catholic orders were under outside authority and were not very autonomous. Sufi orders, on the other hand, did not face such dilemmas; they were autonomous and independent of any authority. While Catholicism and Sufism are different, works of literature from both traditions can be examined side by side; namely two of Chaucer's dream visions (*The Book of the Duchess* and *The Parliament of Fowls*) and from the Sufi tradition, Hafiz's *Diwan* and Attar's *Conference of Birds*. Both Chaucer's dream visions and Sufi visions cannot be taken at face value; they need to be examined closely in order to obtain the intended message. Chaucer was writing at a time when the Church had strong influence and therefore his writing had a moral vein running throughout, as well as a satirical aspect that mocked issues/people that he did not necessarily approve of. It is the intention of this thesis to show through using a mystical/Sufi approach to Chaucer's dream visions that his dream visions had a moral religious vein (rather than an attitude that promoted Church obedience) that was more dominant than what meets the eye. This connection is worthwhile because it will provide readers with a new way of looking at, and analyzing, Chaucer's dream visions and in this way, provide new interpretations and meanings to

be considered. The intention is to do this by looking at each of Chaucer's dream visions and their more orthodox interpretation, followed by looking at some examples of Eastern literature and their accepted interpretation. After this, the common elements between the two areas and how they can both be examined from a mystical/Sufi point of view will be examined.

Classical Sufi scholars have defined Sufism as "a science whose objective is the reparation of the heart and turning it away from all else but God." Alternatively, in the words of the *Darqawi* Sufi teacher Ahmad ibn Ajiba, "a science through which one can know how to travel into the presence of the Divine, purify one's inner self from filth, and beautify it with a variety of praiseworthy traits." Classical Sufis were characterized by their attachment to *dhikr* (a practice of repeating the names of God) and asceticism. Sufism gained adherents among a number of Muslims as a reaction against the worldliness of the early Umayyad Caliphate (661-750 CE). Sufis have spanned several continents and cultures over a millennium, at first expressed through Arabic, then through Persian, Turkish and a dozen other languages. "Orders" (*turuq*), which are either Sunnī or Shī'ī or mixed in doctrine, trace many of their original precepts from the Islamic Prophet Muhammad through his cousin 'Alī, with the notable exception of the *Naqshbandi* who trace their origins through the first Caliph, Abu Bakr. Other exclusive schools of Sufism describe themselves as distinctly Sufi. Modern Sufis often perform *dhikr* after the conclusion of prayers.

While all Muslims believe that they are on the pathway to God and hope to become close to God in Paradise—after death and after the "Final Judgment"—Sufis also believe that it is possible to draw closer to God and to more fully embrace the Divine Presence in this life. The

chief aim of all Sufis is to seek the pleasing of God by working to restore within themselves the primordial state of *fitra*, described in the Qur'an. In this state nothing one does defies God, and all is undertaken with the single motivation of love of God. A secondary consequence of this is that the seeker may be led to abandon all notions of dualism or multiplicity, including a conception of an individual self, and to realize the Divine Unity.

Rather than looking at the Sufi school of thought, I have selected texts that display elements of similarity between Chaucer and the Sufi text. This choice serves to illustrate the aspects of the dream visions and Sufi visions which are shared by both. Both sets of texts are rooted in reality and deal with serious issues such as hypocrisy, methods of conduct and, the best way to live spiritually. These are common themes across the two cultures which become apparent in the texts chosen as they are dealt with under the guise of grieving lovers or the guise of a parliament/conference (Godlas).

This thesis will be organized by looking first at one of Chaucer's dream visions and examining it thoroughly after which, its counterpart in Sufi literature will also be examined for common elements between the two pieces of literature. The texts are also being analyzed in order to see if a Sufi way of thinking can or cannot be applied to Chaucer's dream visions. The sources used deal with dream theory in both cultures, as well as mysticism. The sources also deal with the factors influencing Chaucer and his work, as well as the sources he drew his inspiration from.

It can be seen then, that the similarity between the moral messages of Chaucer's dream visions and the pieces of Sufi literature examined in this thesis is in their aim to provide security

in faith of God, whether it be as a collective community or as an individual. Both aim to do so by using female images to provide comfort once they have been attained. In Chaucer's dream visions, secular ideas and spiritual imperatives are brought into a highly imaginative dialogue with one-another, and in a much more sophisticated way than any other writer had previously attempted. This was achieved through a very specialized use of the dream device, which enabled that part of the mind that is influenced by texts and empirical experience to be critically apprehended. Real dreams are often highly imaginative narratives, and have inspired reflection and interpretation as to their significance throughout the ages. The Bible, the most important written authority of the medieval period, contains a significant number of accounts of specific dreams. However, these accounts involved exceptional figures, and the medieval church often warned Christians against placing any great importance upon the interpretation of dreams. The problem posed by the ambiguous status of dreams in the Christian world, was also evident in their treatment by classical authors, such as Plato, Cicero and Lucretius. One author of late antiquity whom Chaucer demonstrates some knowledge of is Macrobius (c.395-c.423 AD). Macrobius wrote a commentary to Cicero's *The Dream of Scipio*, and in it he includes a five-fold classification of the different kinds of dream. Two of these types of dream are non-prophetic, and are therefore of little significance to him: the *insomnium* (nightmare) and the *visium* or *phantasma* (apparition). The three prophetic classes of dream are the *somnium* (enigmatic dream), the *oraculum* (oracular dream) and the *visio* (prophetic dream). The *somnium* conveys truth in an obscure or hidden form, the *oraculum* in the manner of dialogue with a respected figure, and the *visio* in terms of an enlightening visual experience of future events¹.

¹ Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans., W.H. Stahl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952)

Aristotle distinguished between the ‘agent’ intellect (or active intellect) and the ‘receptive’ intellect (or passive intellect) as the two principal powers of the mind. The receptive intellect is not active, instead it is acted upon. It is shaped by sense impressions and is a storehouse of the images that the senses provide. It is therefore passive and shaped from without. The relevance of this to Chaucer’s description of the courtly subject is that it enables the poet to divide the mind and describe that part of the courtier’s identity that is shaped and determined from without, the receptive intellect, and that which is unshaped and self-determining, the agent intellect². According to Aristotle, the images that a dream is composed of are derived from the receptive intellect giving up several of its contents without the normal guidance of the agent intellect. What stimulates the receptive intellect to do so is physical activity going on either in or around the body of the dreamer. In the dream narrative Chaucer could describe the influence of courtly ideals, literature and social conventions, upon that part of the soul that is determined by texts and empirical experience (the receptive intellect), whilst encouraging reflection upon such influences through critical interpretation of the dream text (effected by the agent intellect) (St. John).

Many people are tempted to say that literature is about life and the human experiences happening around us but this statement’s meaning is problematic. The definition of human experience must be very abstract just to cover all the literature we know about; we would also have to be extremely careful with the definition in order to maintain respect and understanding of the imaginative essence of literature. Anthropology’s distaste for ethnocentrism makes it

² Aristotle, *De Anima*, Bk III Ch. V. 1-2.

difficult for us to rely on examples of experience that bear close resemblance to our own habits. Our tendency to fill the gaps with moral language is useless because it fails to explain how one lives rather than how one should live. The kind of definition needed is the equivalent in human terms of Einstein's "universal elementary laws from which the cosmos can be built up by pure deduction," a theory of the origins and functions of the human psyche, of what each person brings to her unique circumstances.

Psychology might provide literature with such a definition. The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan's reading of Freud has shown that a definition may be found in traditional psychoanalysis. To say that literature deals with human experience is to say that it deals with relations to "objects" or to the social code for mediating them. Psychoanalytic criticism has been interested either in how literary works express the psychopathology of their creators or how well they depict dreams, neurotic symptoms and the other phenomena on which psychoanalysis is based. In short, psychoanalytic criticism treats literature as symptoms or depictions of symptoms. This limiting of interest is the source of the reductiveness that has made psychoanalytic criticism so intolerable to many readers (Bruss, 62-63).

Religious symbolism of the Early Middle Ages emphasizes the representation of Christ as celestial ruler. It is interesting that this picture of unified control of the world occurs at a time when the real institutions of the City of Man were at their weakest. From the year 1000 on, however, we find increasing representation given to the twin images of the Virgin Mary and of Jesus, represented either as a babe in his mother's arms or as the suffering Christ (Wolf, 294). Mary-in Christian thought-is both spouse and mother. This duality was first clearly announced

by the Syrian Ephraem (c. 306-73, quoted in Graef 1963: 57-58) in one of his hymns: "I am also mother for I bore thee in my womb. I am also bride." As mother of the messiah, she is also a personification of the sacred community (Galatians 4:25; John 13; Revelation 12). As bride, she is "the most glorious of brides... of Christ, the true heavenly bridegroom" (Modestus of Jerusalem, after 600, quoted in Graef 1963: 137). Personified as the Church, Mary also symbolizes the sacred community in its relation with Christ (II Corinthians 11; Ephesians 5), and it is in this sense that the Song of Solomon, with its frankly erotic imagery, has been interpreted to signify the relation of Christ and church. The bride is also the Holy City, the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2); her virginity connotes the singleness of mind with which she obeys the messiah, her husband. Her opponent-and opposite-is the Great Whore of Babylon (Revelation 17-18). But Mary is not merely spouse, mother, and church; she is also the Second Eve, as Christ is the Second Adam (I Corinthians 15:22). "Christ," wrote Justin Martyr (died 165) "became man by the Virgin so that the disobedience which proceeded from the serpent might be destroyed in the same way as it originated. For Eve, being a virgin and undefiled, having conceived the word from the serpent, brought forth disobedience and death. The Virgin Mary, however, having received faith and joy . . . answered: Be it done to me according to thy word" (quoted in Graef 1963:38). (Wolf, 295).

Like Latin Christianity, Islam also distinguishes between God and the community of believers. It, too, operates within a Near Eastern tradition of using female terminology for the body of the faithful; as Massignon has pointed out

The word Umma, etymologically, refers to the Mother (Umm), to the tent (Bayt; Hebr. Ohel; Arab, ahl) of the chief's wife, to the household of the chief, to his cognatic³ family and to his clientele; in opposition to his agnatic⁴ clan, and to his race, designated, as Ibn Khaldun noted, by the word Sha'b, "people"; the racist sentiment (shu'ubiya), the spirit of the body ('asabiya) of the clan denotes this particular nationalist particularism (1947:152).

The principle of incorporation is agnatic; the principle of alliance cognatic and female. But as the agnatic line of the descent group incorporates and overcomes the alliances through females, so the Islamic *umma* appears subject onto the will of God. (Wolf, 296)

Nevertheless, we have seen that in Islam, too, there appeared a gap between state and *umma*, a gap which came to be filled by a developing infrastructure of corporations and religious associations. Like many associations in Latin Europe, this filled the interstices between state and church, so the *tariqas* similarly used a religious pattern of organization to provide a substitute for political order at a lower social and political level. Just as the Christian orders had found an expressive symbol to sum up their experience of increased order in the image of Mary, so the Sufis sought an expressive symbol of their experience of a spiritual order in the midst of disorder in the Love of God. There is an occasional use of a female idiom in Sufi hymns that sometimes sing of Nu'm, using a conventional name for a man's beloved; and symbolic use is made of a feminine being called The Veiled Idea (Rougemont 1966: 110). But these are mere synonyms for God, and what is at stake in Sufi thought is the Love of God. That Love leads to the rapture of ecstasy that breaks the

³ Cognatic kinship is a mode of descent calculated from an ancestor or ancestress counted through any combination of male and female links, or a system of bilateral kinship where relations are traced through both a father and mother.

⁴ Related on or descended from the father's or male side.

bounds of consciousness, defined as ignorance, and reaches knowledge (*ma'rifa*), in merger with the Divine Beloved. It is here that mysticism could use its methods to connect state and religious institutions; Islamic mysticism (Sufism) through visions of becoming one with God, attaining spiritual peace and, in a way, teaching how to follow and accept the rules of the state. Christian mysticism would serve to reconcile subjects to the church's dictates which, is itself, controlled by the state to a certain extent.

The direction of the Sufi thrust, however, proved quite different from the organizational thrust in Latin Christendom. First, it is obvious that the schism between state and *umma* meant, as Ibn Khaldun saw clearly, the resurgence of corporate group solidarity (*asabiya*), including the solidarity of agnatic corporations, and the weakening of that only other source of solidarity conceived by him, the solidarity due to a common religion. The idiom of the Love of God did not express a new and growing overarching collective security, such as is implied in the divine motherhood of Mary, but an individual relation in which the believer merges with God in an individualized relation. The exercises which are calculated to bring on the experiences of merger are group exercises, but the end sought is an individual end (Wolf, 297). Suffice it to say that religious traditions such as, Christianity and Islam-take pains to emphasize the value of material creation as God's gift to man; equally significant is the fact that the salvation of man in the Western traditions is affected through the linear historical process. Materiality is so valued in Christianity and Islam that the divine Word takes on actual material form and dwells within the community. The Johannine formulation, *et Verbum caro factum est* ("and the Word became flesh"-John 1:14) can easily be revised to *et Verbum Liber factum est* ("and the Word became book") in an Islamic framework (Awn, 245). We will see the importance of words in the

following chapters when dealing with the Sufi texts, namely Hafiz's *Diwan* and Attar's *The Conference of the Birds*.

A Brief Survey of Mysticism: A Look at Christian and Islamic Mysticism

Mysticism is defined as the search for unity with, [identity](#) with, or conscious awareness of an ultimate [reality](#), [divinity](#), [spiritual truth](#), or [God](#) through direct experience, vision, or insight. Mysticism deals with a practice or practices intended to bring about that experience or awareness. The monastic ideal of leaving the world in order to lead a life of penance and prayer, either in seclusion or within a community, formed the context for most forms of Christian mysticism down to the end of the twelfth century. According to McGinn, this monastic layer of mysticism was primarily biblical and liturgical-through the body of rites prescribed for public worship- in the sense that it sought God in and through personal appropriation of the mystical understanding of the Bible and religious rites and traditions as cultivated within the liturgical life of the monastic community. Most monastic mystics rarely revealed their own experiences of God, but instead expressed their understanding of mystical transformation through biblical teaching and expositions meant to lead readers into the mystery of the consciousness of God's presence (McGinn 197). Those that were illiterate chose to express their experiences vocally, their audience not only being the very few who could read and write but the majority who could not; one example would be Margery Kempe who could not read or write and had mystical experiences. She related her experiences orally and was often regarded with suspicion. The purpose of Christian mysticism is to obtain spiritual truths unavailable through intellectual methods; this is achieved by learning how to think like Christ. [William Inge](#) divides this *scala perfectionis* into three stages: the "purgative" or ascetic stage, the "illuminative" or contemplative stage, and the "unitive" stage, in which God may be beheld "face to face." These

mystical experiences are often sexually tinted in both Christian mysticism and Islamic mysticism.

The word monasticism (from the Greek monos, meaning "single" or "alone") deals with the choice made by individuals to attain an ideal level of perfection or transcendent religious experience by leaving the world. Technically, monasticism includes both the life of the hermit, and the life of a cenobite which consists of a monk living in a society which offers only a certain amount of solitude. Self-denial is an inherent part of monasticism and may include fasting, silence, lack of personal ownership, and the undergoing bodily discomfort. Poverty, celibacy and allegiance to a spiritual leader are also included. These practices aim to develop a more intense relationship with God, as well as to achieve some kind of personal enlightenment. There would also have been the economic/cultural contribution to the community, of which agriculture would have been an aspect along with the mingling of politics where huge abbeys would have more influence than smaller abbeys.

Christian monasticism has its roots in the 4th century C.E. in the deserts of Egypt and Syria where Saint Anthony the Great was connected with the first Egyptian hermits and Saint Pachomius (d.346), had connections with the first cenobite communities in Egypt. After introducing charitable service as a work discipline, monasticism was placed in an urban context by Saint Basil (379). Saint Benedict of Nursia (6th century) is mainly responsible for organizing western monasticism after basing the life of monastic communities on his Benedictine rule until the 12th century. Among the principal monastic orders that evolved in the Middle Ages were the

Carthusians in the 11th century and the Cistercians in the 12th; the mendicant orders, or friars--Dominicans, Franciscans, and Carmelites--arose in the 13th century.

For the psychoanalyst Carl Jung, the goal of human striving is the quest for wholeness through inner knowledge. This embodies a journey toward the center of the psyche, a journey toward the self. For Jung, one of the best examples of this process is the symbolism of Christ and the cross. In Jungian terms, the crucified Christ has deep meaning for the unconscious. The cross is a symbol of unity demonstrating the importance of the center. It signifies the self and functions as an organizing theme. The symbolism of transformation associated with death, rebirth, and ascent to the spiritual realm is also an attribute of the cross (Pennachio 237).

What the Christians regard as literal the Gnostics regard as symbolic. Jesus' life is a parable that maps the interior world, indicative of an internal journey that is both transformative and divine. As is true for Jung, crucifixion, suffering, and resurrection are interpreted as symbolic milestones on the road to spiritual enlightenment. They represent movement to a higher level, transcending one's present state of consciousness. Ascent to the heights, to the place of revelation, is the domain of the spiritual. It is the triumph of spirit over flesh.

“In the Gnostic world view, there is only one light or God. Through some kind of emanation of this light, the world came into existence. In the process the divine man or emanated light became divided up, scattered and imprisoned in individual human bodies. Most Gnostics felt that the human body serves as a kind of trap or prison for inner divine sparks that are part of one true light. For the Gnostic Christian, Jesus was a wisdom-type figure who came into this world to help us realize who we really are, and thus liberate us from the bondage of human flesh (Pennachio 239).”

Gnosticism is defined as the doctrine of salvation by knowledge. This definition, based on the etymology of the word (*gnosis* "knowledge", *gnostikos*, "good at knowing"), is correct as far as it goes, but it gives only one, though perhaps the predominant, characteristic of Gnostic systems of thought. Whereas Judaism and Christianity, and almost all pagan systems, hold that the soul attains its proper end by obedience of mind and will to the Supreme Power, i.e. by faith and works, it is markedly peculiar to Gnosticism that it places the salvation of the soul merely in the possession of a quasi-intuitive knowledge of the mysteries of the universe and of magic formulae indicative of that knowledge. Gnostics were "people who knew", and their knowledge at once constituted them a superior class of beings, whose present and future status was essentially different from that of those who, for whatever reason, did not know (Catholic Encyclopedia, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06592a.htm>, September 14 2011).

An interesting piece of literature which deals with dreams is, *The Dream of Scipio* written by [Cicero](#) (date unknown), which deals with the account of a created dream vision of the Roman general Scipio Aemilianus and which Chaucer frequently referred to in his work. The dream vision basically deals with Scipio Aemilianus being visited by his dead grandfather, Scipio Africanus in North Africa. The purpose of his visit is to show his grandson his future and to re-emphasize the importance of a Roman soldier's duty since once he dies will be rewarded by earning a place in the Milky Way. Despite being given all this advice, Scipio Aemilianus still realizes that Rome is an insignificant part of the universe. He sees this after observing the climatic belts of the earth, the snow fields and deserts, along with referring to the planetary spheres using Pythagorean thought and the idea of the Music of the Spheres. There is also a discussion of the nature of the Divine, the soul and virtue, from the Stoic point of view (Reid).

For Cicero, the great statesman is the living embodiment of the Universe as a natural order, thus fulfilling on earth the function of the Cosmic God. Cicero praises the practical and the theoretical life as equally valuable (Luck 208-209), rather than favoring one over the other as other philosophers before him did. In a very significant passage of the *Somnium*, the connection between the theoretical and the practical way of life is clarified. How will Scipio be able to follow his ancestors on the road to heaven? The answer is: By observing *iustitia* (justice) and *pietas* (duty or devotion). But how will he realize the meaning of these two virtues? The answer is: By the contemplation of the heavenly bodies (Luck 210).

One work of literature that deals with similar subject matter but is Eastern in origin is the *Book of Arda Viraf*. If mysticism is taken to be an expression of man's belief in direct connection with the godhead, the well-known ethical concepts of the Zoroastrians—for whom every particular deed of daily life, good or bad, is the joint product of man and either the principle of Good or of Evil—might also be considered as unconscious expressions of a pantheistic type of mysticism (Zarrinkoob 139). The devoted believers in this early faith (Zoroastrianism), worshippers of light as they are sometimes termed, paid pious devotion to the great god *Ormazd* or *Ahura Mazda*, and by creed they were faithful followers of Zoroaster (Prophet of Ancient Iran). A characteristic tenet of the old Zoroastrian creed was Dualism. This dogma recognized the existence of two primeval spirits, *Ormazd* and *Ahriman*, the Good and the Evil, whose influence pervades the world (Jackson 55). The *Book of Arda Viraf* is a Zoroastrian religious text that deals with the dream journey of a devout Zoroastrian, Arda Viraf—chosen for his religious way of life—to journey to the next world in order to prove the reality of Zoroastrian beliefs. The book is divided into five sections: Introduction; Journey to Heaven; Heaven; Hell;

and Epilogue. After drinking wine mixed with a hallucinogen, his soul has an otherworldly experience. During this experience, he meets a lovely woman named Den who symbolizes his faith and virtue. He then crosses the *Chinvat* bridge (bridge of judgment) where he is met and led by "[Srosh](#), the pious and [Adar](#), the angel" through the places outside of heaven ("star track", "moon track" and "sun track") for the religious who have failed to follow the Zoroastrian rules. In heaven, Viraf is shown the souls of the virtuous who live an idealized form of their previous life on earth. After seeing this, he is then led by his guides to the depths of hell to be shown the sufferings of the wicked. After completing his dream quest, Viraf is told by Ahura Mazda that the only proper and true way of life which needs to be preserved at all times is the Zoroastrian faith (Hang).

We can see similarities between the book of *Arda Viraf* and *The Dream of Scipio*, although one is Zoroastrian and the other is Roman (Republic) in origin. Both texts consist of journeys undertaken by men who are shown ways of life and are expected to return home and tell others about what they have learnt in order to lead a better life. *Arda Viraf* is taken on a more spiritual journey designed to prove to him that the Zoroastrian faith is the proper faith that people are supposed to follow; his reinforced convictions allow him to return to his people and lead them by example as well as enabling him to mature spiritually on a personal level. In the case of Cicero's text, Scipio is a general who is taken to the next world in order to show him what virtuous qualities a good leader should have in order to lead a good and strong nation or government. We can see that the objectives of the two journeys are similar, one has the purpose of reinforcing religious beliefs and, one has the purpose of providing principles and instructions that are needed to be a successful and spiritual leader.

Just as the *Dream of Scipio* is an example of anabasis, the last two thirds of Dante's *Divine Comedy* is another good illustration. Dante's *Divine Comedy* tells of Dante's expedition- which starts the night before Good Friday and ends the Wednesday after Easter in the spring of 1300-through the demesnes of the dead. It is written in first person. He has two guides to help him on his journey; the first guide is Virgil who leads him through Hell and Purgatory. The second guide is Dante's childhood love, Beatrice, who guides him through Heaven. Metaphorically, the *Inferno* signifies the Christian soul understanding the true meaning of sin with the three beasts, which act as obstacles in the wood of Darkness, acting as the three types of sin: the hedonistic, the vicious, and the malevolent. These also serve as the main partitions of Dante's Hell: Upper Hell (the first 5 Circles) for the hedonistic sins; Circles 6 and 7 for the vicious sins; and Circles 8 and 9 for the malevolent sins.

Metaphorically, the *Purgatorio* signifies Christian life. Singing *in exitu Israel de Aegypto*, Christian souls arrive escorted by an angel. In his Letter to [Cangrande della Scala](#), Dante explains that this allusion to the migration of the tribe of Israel from Egypt refers to both the redemption of Christ and the transformation of the soul to the state of grace after having been in a state of sorrow and misery because of sin (Paragraph 7 of letter). It is appropriate then, that Dante and Beatrice arrive in Paradise on Easter Sunday. The *Purgatorio* is noteworthy for showing medieval knowledge that the Earth is a sphere because of the fact that Dante discusses the different stars seen in the southern hemisphere, the changed place of the sun, and the different time zones of the Earth. Dante says that at this point, it is sunset in Jerusalem, midnight on the River Ganges, and sunrise in Purgatory.

Beatrice guides Dante through the nine celestial spheres of heaven after the initial ascension in Paradise (Canto I of vol. III). These are concentric and spherical, similar to [Aristotelian](#) and [Ptolemaic](#) cosmology. The vision of heaven that Dante receives is only one that his human eyes allow him to see since it would be too great otherwise. Consequently, the description of heaven in the Cantos is Dante's vision, unsure in its proper makeup. There are different levels of Paradise for souls which are allotted according to their human ability to love God. In this way there is a hierarchy; all the souls experience God but some more than others because of the extent they have allowed themselves to experience Him above other things. It is vital to remember that in Dante's depiction, all the souls in heaven have some degree of contact with God. While the different classifications of sin were the basis for the structure of the *Inferno* and *Purgatorio*, the four cardinal virtues and the three theological virtues make up the basis for the structure of the *Paradiso*.

The sunlit rose that dominates the culminating cantos of the *Paradiso* proclaims the fulfillment of the poet's spiritual quest. Purged of sin and perfect in holiness, he is granted a mystic vision of eternal glory. This vision is twofold: the poet first perceives a gigantic white rose, symbolizing divine love, on whose petals are enthroned the entire company of saints; he then lifts his eyes to the sun, symbol of God, shining down upon the rose. The rose symbolizes the necessary precursor (revealing the saints) to revealing God Himself. The symbols of the sun and the rose are interdependent and inseparable in the *Paradiso*. The sun gives life to the rose and the rose manifests the sun's power and glory. An understanding of the mystic interrelation between the Creator and His creation marks the end of Dante's journey and the highest attainment of spiritual vision.

Just as Western scholars have dealt with subjects of a philosophical and religious/mystical nature, so have Eastern scholars in the area of mysticism or Sufism. Classical Sufi scholars have defined Sufism-Islamic mysticism- as "a science whose objective is the reparation of the heart and turning it away from all else but God." Alternatively, in the words of the Sufi teacher [Ahmad ibn Ajiba](#), Sufism is defined as, "a science through which one can know how to travel into the [presence of the Divine](#), purify one's inner self from filth, and beautify it with a variety of praiseworthy traits." (Michon) Islamic mysticism has its beginnings in the ancient agreement described in Qur'an 7: 172⁵. The initial stage of Sufism, the ascetical tradition, centers on the existence of evil within man and the world. The later expansion of the science of opposites (Manichaeism) by rapturous mystics results in an exclusive moral scheme whose basis is the mystical relationship, not the shari'ah (Islamic laws). An example of a Manichaeistic sect would be the Cathars in the Languedoc region of France. It had its roots in Armenia and Bulgaria and flourished in the 12th and 13th centuries; we can see how ideas from the near East moved to the West to exert influence there. Finally, Ibn Arabi's persistently determined elaboration of *wahdat al-wujud*, the unity of Being, diminishes man's individual moral choice to an illusion, except insofar as man realizes himself to be one with God (Awn 240).

⁵ And when thy Lord brought forth from the children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants, and made them bear witness about themselves: Am I not your Lord? They said: Yes; we bear witness. Lest you should say on the day of Resurrection: We were unaware of this.(7:172)

و اذ اخذ ربك من بني آدم من ظهورهم ذرّبتهم واشهدهم على انفسهم الست بربكم قالوا بلى شهدنا ان تقولوا يوم القيمة انا كنا عن هذا غفلين

Early approaches to Qur'anic exegesis fostered the development of Sufism by employing imaginative, allegorical, and esoteric interpretations of the text (*ta'wil*) as well as the more exoteric method of analysis (*tafsir*) based on philology, grammar, history, and dogma. *Ta'wil* emphasizes the search for the obscure, hidden meaning of the divine Word. The sixth imam, Ja'far as-Sadiq (d. 765 c.e.), interpreted particular verses as symbolic allusions which refer the individual back directly to his or her personal experiences of the spiritual life. If an understanding of the text is not accessible solely through exoteric analysis or reliance on the text's self-revelatory quality, of equal significance must be the interior state of the interpreter. Consequently one has insight in direct proportion to one's spiritual sensitivity and development. Thus a dynamic interrelationship is forged between individual and text, where each is perceived as a living reality, one continually increasing in spiritual awareness, the other revealing itself as a Word whose depths can never be plumbed (Awn 241).

In mysticism, dreams are abstract and seen as a journey of the soul. Dreams are representative of insight and are given more credit than sight. Many *hadiths* tell of Muhammad's expertise at dream interpretation. His companions would come to him and tell him their dreams, and he in turn would explain their meaning to them. Not surprisingly, dream interpretation has always been a popular branch of learning in Islam. In certain respects, Islamic dream interpretation is similar to the dream interpretation that one finds in popular books today or in books on psychology: always there is attention to the idea that the perceived image is a sign of something beyond itself. The secret in dream interpretation is to recognize what has displayed itself in the specific image, but in order to do that, the interpreter must have a good knowledge of human psychology in general and of the person whose dream is being interpreted in particular.

The most important principle of the science of dream interpretation is relevance. In order to interpret a dream correctly, the qualities present in the dream should be recognized before being able to understand how these qualities correspond to the qualities of something else that is concealed from the perception of the dreamer (Murata & Chittick , 222).

Cerulli (1949) has enumerated the analogies between the *Miraj* (the Prophet Mohammad's ascension to heaven) and the *Divina Commedia*. He points out that Gabriel the Arch-angel has in the former the function attributed to Virgil in the latter, and mentions the parallelism of topics in the didactic sections of the two works and the coincidence of some details in the descriptions of the infernal scenery, torments, and episodes. There is likewise a striking conformity in the organization of the earthly Paradise, its springs and rivers, its protecting frame of purifying fire, the tree of happiness, and the symbolism inherent in these aspects of an enchanted garden. Finally, the structure of the mystical rose of the blessed in Dante's Empyrean seems to have its counterpart in Mohammed's seventh heaven thickly peopled with singing angels diving into an ocean of light (Olschki 5).

The Persian poet Ferdowsi⁶ wrote the *Shâhnameh* around 1000 A.D, which narrates the history of Persia all the way from the beginning of the world along with the introduction of the

⁶ Ferdowsi was born in Khorasan in a village near Tous, in 935 CE. He devoted most of his adult life to composing his epic the *Shâhnameh* for the chief implementers of the renewal of Persian cultural traditions after the seventh century Arab conquest. These were the Samanid princes of Khoraan. It is said that Ferdowsi died around 1020 CE in poverty, confident of his and his poem's fame although he was embittered by royal neglect.

Ferdowsi worked for thirty years in order to complete the *Shâhnameh* or *The Epic of the Kings* which is one of the classics of the world. The contents consist of hero's tales and the style of writing and narration of events takes the reader back to ancient Persia to experience them for themselves.

basics of civilization (fire, cooking, metallurgy, law) to the Aryans and finally ends with the Arab conquest of Persia. Zoroaster's view of the human condition comes through in the description of the piece's many characters which are both male and female. Free will plays a large role; all of the characters are complex and are not controlled by anybody. The best characters have bad flaws, and the worst have moments of humanity; thus, we have people demonstrating their free will in order to make their decisions combined either with the force of Good or the force of Evil.

Just as the above works of literature dealt with various issues that embody basically the same themes, Chaucer's dream visions follow generally the same pattern; the dreams, once they start, are very elaborate and take on an other-worldly quality in some aspects that make the readers all the more aware of the fact that they are dreams representative of something else that the author/narrator is criticizing or discussing at the time. We can see that the dreams deal with issues other than what Chaucer is discussing at the time; they act like real dreams that have hidden meanings available only when closely examined. Kruger relates the dream vision in its late medieval phase to the then current theories of dreaming. He finds in the productions of Chaucer and others a distinct kind of 'middle vision' corresponding to a theoretical category of dream. As Cicero's *Somnium* (54-51 B.C.) is half-way between dreams caused by divine inspiration and those caused by physical or mental disorder, so its literary counterpart is situated in a similarly ambiguous position. Positing a 'growing distance between humanity and divinity' in the later medieval period, Kruger sees the late medieval English dream vision as a means of negotiating the increasingly tenuous connections between mundane reality and the transcendent

world; its ability to respond to an acute sense of 'betweenness' helps to account for its popularity (Brown 23).

It is not difficult to see why later medieval poets found the dream such a wonderful means of framing their narratives. As a rhetorical device it has numerous advantages. It intrigues and engages the interest of an audience by appealing to a common experience and by inviting its members to become analysts or interpreters (Brown 25). It allows for the introduction of disparate and apparently incongruous material. It encourages and facilitates the use of memorable images. It permits the author to disavow responsibility for what follows. It invokes an authoritative and impressive tradition of visionary literature. It provides a way for dealing with a wide variety of subjects: divine prophecy; erotic adventure; political or philosophical speculation; apocalyptic vision (Brown 25). This could be seen as a prelude to Freud's theory of censorship in which the unconscious allows suggestive or disturbing ideas to filter through to the dreamer's consciousness in the guise of something harmless and meaningless.

The dream framework provided poets in the second half of the fourteenth century with an instrument of radical analysis and evaluation. The dream enabled writers to explore the roots both of the self and of society. To a certain extent, the literary dream is the meeting place of both, being at once intensely private and expansively public, providing a means whereby the outer world can be read through the inner. Dreams, by their nature, are able to express a sense of fragmentation, a loss of continuity between the self and the outer world, since they operate through striking juxtaposition, distortion, displacement, condensation, and apparent incoherence.

A dream is therefore well suited to the representation and analysis of alienation, of a sense of lost authority, or of a searching for connections that have become hidden, tenuous, or problematic (Brown 45).

A Comparison of Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess* and Hafiz's *Diwan*

The Book of the Duchess is one of Chaucer's earliest works (between 1369-1372) and was written in commemoration of the Duchess of Lancashire at the request of John of Gaunt⁷, the Duchess's husband. The poem deals with several themes such as grief over the loss of a loved one and the sleeplessness it entails, the presence of nature, the Black knight and what he represents, and the theme of courtly love. These various themes are dealt with in detail, with the narrator giving hints about his opinion regarding the issues, and we are given references to important works from classical literature which tells us that the author is placing his work among those pieces. In dealing with the immediate cause of a narrator's preoccupation, we are in effect discussing his receptivity. Whether brooding on a personal grief or a political crisis, or in a state of spiritual elevation or frustrated love, his inwardness predisposes him to the experience of dreaming. He has become susceptible and sensitized by inner preoccupation (Brown 32).

The poem starts out with the narrator telling of his inability to sleep because of his grief over losing the love of his life. He says he has been unable to sleep properly for eight years and that it is like a disease that is eating away at him. The poem explicitly and insistently concerns itself with melancholic illness occasioned by love and loss. The poem's tripartite structure-focused first on the narrator, then on Alcyone, and finally on the knight-depends upon a triple

⁷ Chaucer was related to John of Gaunt near the end of his life; they were brothers-in-law. Chaucer was married to Philippa de Roet, who was the sister of John's third wife, Katherine. It can be assumed that, if the Duchess had not died, then Chaucer would not have written *The Book of the Duchess* due to a lack of motive or circumstance which would move him to write it in the first place.

reiteration of melancholia (Kruger 64). The narrator decides to try reading in bed as a method of falling asleep and picks up a book of legends and myths; the story he reads is about King Seys and his queen Alcyone. The story of Ceyx and Alcyone, read by the narrator for diversion as he lays sleepless in bed, directly echoes his own melancholic illness. We hear about their tragedy in detail; the king and queen are very happy together when king Seys has to leave home in order to go on a voyage. A fierce storm strikes the ship and all the crew and the king drown. Alcyone is beside herself with worry when her husband does not come home and no trace of him is found by the searchers sent out after him. As a result of her grief, she neither eats or sleeps and eventually begs the goddess Juno to send her to sleep so that she can have a dream that will inform her about her husband's whereabouts and whether he is dead or alive; she promises to make Juno a sacrifice if she gives her what she wishes for. Juno hears Alcyone's desperate prayer and sends her into a deep sleep; while she is sleeping, Juno sends a messenger to Morpheus, the god of sleep, with the orders to appear to Alcyone in the form of her dead husband telling her of his demise and where his body is so that it can be properly buried. Juno's orders are carried out and Alcyone is so overcome by grief at the news of her husband's death that she dies of a broken heart a few days later.

Alcyone's illness, like the narrator's, eventuates in a dream linked to both body and divinity; a dream that reveals the truth but at the same time is closely connected to Alcyone's psychosomatic distress. Here, the somatic connections of the dream are emphasized not only by the literal bringing of Ceyx's body to Alcyone's bedside but also by certain clearly melancholic features of the dream situation. Although it is Juno and her 'messenger' who respond most directly to Alcyone's prayer for the mercy of sleep, the divinity immediately responsible for the

dream is Morpheus, the ruler of a dark, hellish sort of underworld. This dark underworld, from which Alcyone's revelatory dream arises, is inhabited by creatures (potential dreams) who, frozen in lethargy, echo in their attitudes, Alcyone's own despondent poses: "Somme henge her chyn upon hir breast" (174; compare "she hung down the hed," 122); "And somme lay naked in her bed" (176; compare "And broghten hir in bed al naked," 125) (Kruger 67). Here we can see the Freudian aspect of censorship in Alcyone's dream; her subconscious is being influenced by the deep rooted knowledge of her husband's death in such a way, that it manifests itself in a dream revealing this hard truth to her.

After reading about the plight of Alcyone, the narrator sends his own prayer about wishing to fall asleep with his own promises of great gifts if his wish is granted. We already see the parallels the narrator is drawing between his situation and that of characters from classical literature. The narrator falls asleep and promptly starts to dream. Before we get a description of his dream, we are told that it is on the same level as the dream of Scipio and of Joseph's dreams from the Bible. We are immediately told that his dream is so important that it has a clear message for people to follow; in other words, we are being told to pay close attention and to expect something that holds a great lesson which is comparable to the Bible and classical Greek literature. The narrator's dream is similar to that of mystics in that he seeks to find comfort and solace in something higher than what the material world to offer him. This is why we get the impression that his dream is supposed to be given the same importance as the dreams of Joseph from the Bible; Joseph's dreams brought him closer to God just as the narrator feels that he has been brought closer to a higher being after having had his dream.

The narrator's own dream stands in a similarly intimate connection to his illness, and particularly to the state of melancholy. In the dream, the narrator wakes up in a luxurious chamber that has windows painted with scenes from the story of Troy and the *Romance of the Rose*⁸. The weather is perfect, not too hot or cold, and the birds are singing; in fact, the description of the place is so idyllic, it reminds the reader of paradise and we wonder if this was the narrator's intent. We are constantly being reminded that the author/narrator considers his dream to be as important as dreams that had religious messages or lessons for running a successful government and the principles one should follow in life. This only serves to make us pay closer attention to the underlying meanings of what the narrator is saying instead of just taking his dream at face value and discarding it as a common occurrence brought on by grief and an overactive imagination. Paradoxically, the constraints of authority within the dream world coincide with a loss of personal control and a sense of liberation. No longer responsible for his own actions (or inaction), the dreamer comes under the influence of powers beyond himself, to which he has no choice but to abandon himself. This is as true of the religious vision as it is of the secular dream. One critic sees this kind of surrender as a response to, or compensation for, the preoccupations of waking life (Brown 35).

The narrator wakes up in his dream room and soon hears a hunting horn signaling a hunt that is nearby or is about to start. He gets up and goes to join them; he soon finds himself separated from the main hunt as he goes after the game by himself and this is how he comes across the Black Knight sitting on a log, looking miserable and sorry for himself. The knight of

⁸ The *Romance of the Rose* was written in two stages. The first 4058 lines were written by Guillaume de Lorris circa 1230. Around 1275, Jean de Meun added another 17, 724 lines.

course suffers from an illness similar to that of both the narrator and Alcyone: “he henges hys hed adoun” (461) repeats the gesture of Alcyone and of the inhabitants of the land of the Sleep; and his “compleynte” (464), with its “dedly sorwful soun” (462), echoes the “dedly slepyngge soun” (162) of Morpheus’ cave. Like narrator’s illness, the knight’s is here anatomized in some physiological detail:

*“Whan he had mad thus his complaynte,
Hys sorwful hert gas faste faynte
And his spirites waxen dede;
The blood was fled for pure drede
Doun to hys herte, to make hym warm-
For wel hyt feled the herte had harm-
To wite eke why hyt was adrad
By kynde, and for to make hyt glad,
For hyt ys membre principal
Of the body; and that made al
Hys hewe chaunge and wexe grene
And pale, for ther noo ys sene
In no manner lym of hys. (487-99)”*

Although here the focus is on disturbances of the heart rather than the head, a mental fixation like the narrator’s is also detailed:

*“He spak noght,
But argued with his owne thoght,
And in hys wyt disputed faste
Why and how hys myght laste;
Hym thoghte hys sorwes were so smerte*

*And lay so colde upon hys herte.
So throggh hys sorwe and hevvy thoght,
Made hym that he herde me noght;
For he had wel nygh lost hys mynde,
Thogh Pan, that men clepeth god of kynde,
Were for hys sorwes never so wroth. (503-513)''*

When we finally hear what is bothering the knight, we immediately see the parallels; the knight is also grieving over the loss of a loved one. We now have three sub-plots that tie in together; we have the narrator grieving for the loss of his love, the story of Alcyone in which she grieves for the death of her husband, and now the anguish of the Black Knight as he grieves for the death of his love as well. Each case has the underlying fact that the lovers in question died of disease or shipwreck. Each case also has the underlying fact that the people who loved them, wished they were also dead with the exception of the narrator; we know that his grief is great, but we never hear that he wishes he were dead.

The narrator persuades the Black Knight to tell him what is on his mind and we hear the details of his woe and what has happened to him. It turns out that when the knight had gone to serve under a new lord he met a lady whom he fell in love with and idolized from afar; this is where the theme of courtly love comes in, the act of idolizing a lady and creating songs or poems about her. We have seen this practice with Dante as he idolized the love for a lady in his work. In the beginning, the knight was afraid to tell the lady about his love since she is of higher social status. His fears turn out to be justified since, when he eventually finds the courage to confess his love, she rejects him at first. It is only later that the lady accepts his love and they live a

happy life together until she dies of a disease. This is the reason the knight is bemoaning his fate and wishes for death; the narrator does not support his wish and manages to make the knight change his mind about wanting to commit suicide, due to religious principles. After sitting with the Knight and discussing his troubles, the narrator wakes up and says that he has had a strange dream and that he now wishes to write it down. By telling us about these two dreams the narrator has conveyed his message and no longer has any need to talk more about his troubles. The dream of the *Book of the Duchess* is not simply somatic but rather an intervention in bodily illness supported by the moral force of the dream's traditional transcendent connections. Chaucer's dream moves towards a correction of physical illness that depends, in its notion of somatic health, upon certain moral imperatives (Kruger 70).

Alcyone's dream may be taken as at least a partial model for the narrator's. Alcyone's dream as Chaucer retells it works towards a cure of Alcyone by demanding that she moderate her 'excessive' reaction to Ceyx's absence: "Let be your sorwful lyf,/ For in your sorwe there lyth no red" (202-203). The dream operates through the body of Ceyx, and its primary goal is a relief of Alcyone's bodily and psychological distress. At the same time, all that is somatic in the dream depends upon the action of the gods, and its argument, intended to return Alcyone to bodily health, is directed towards spiritual correction, demanding a detachment from body, a recognition of the limitations of earthly happiness: "I am but ded" (204); "To lytel while oure blysse lasteth!" (211) the return to somatic health depends somewhat paradoxically upon a rejection of body, a reordering of spirit that will allow Alcyone to resume an ordered life in the world. While the correction needed for the narrator's return to health is even more complex, it too ultimately involves a simultaneous movement towards reordering the body and letting it go

(Kruger 70). If we apply a Sufi method of analysis to *The Book of the Duchess*, then we can see that Alcyone's plight can be closely linked to that of a Sufi mystic who wishes to be united with the Beloved (God). It is in this way that the poem takes on a religious meaning; the loss and grief Alcyone feels over the loss of her husband can be equated with the sense of loss while on the search for fulfillment and union with God. The dream of Alcyone where she sees and learns of her husband's death is devastating on two levels because one, she has lost her husband and two, she has lost her connection with God. Alcyone's dream is again representative of the Black Knight's plight because he is suffering from grief over the loss of his wife. He is also struggling with himself internally about whether or not to take matters into his own hands-in the form of suicide-in order to reconnect with his wife again in the afterlife. This can be viewed that through the loss of his wife, the Black Knight has lost his connection with God and is trying to reconnect through any means possible; even sacrificing his life if it means being able to be close to God. By using reason, the narrator manages to convince the Black Knight to refrain from taking his own life and to just give the grieving process time to run its course. By doing so, the narrator remains on the good side of God and stands a better chance of reconnecting with Him. If Alcyone's dream is representative of the Black Knight's plight, then both frameworks are representative of the narrator's plight; he is unable to sleep due to grief and is listless. His recounting of Alcyone's and the Black Knight's plights are symbolic of his own loss and desire for union with the Beloved. It is in this way that Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* takes on a religious aspect that is comparable with its counterparts in Eastern culture.

According to Jung, dreams are a way of communicating and acquainting yourself with the unconscious. Dreams are not attempts to conceal your true feelings from the waking mind,

but rather they are a window to your unconscious. They serve to guide the waking self to achieve wholeness and offer a solution to a problem you are facing in your waking life.

Jung views the ego as your sense of self and how you portray yourself to the world. Part of Jung's theory is that all things can be viewed as paired opposites: good/evil, male/female, or love/hate. So working in opposition to the ego, is the "counterego" or what he refers to as *the shadow*. The shadow represents the rejected aspects of yourself that you do not wish to acknowledge. The shadow is more primitive, somewhat uncultured, and a little awkward. Since dreams are a way of communicating with the unconscious, Jung believed that dream images reveal something about yourself, your relationships with others, and situations in your waking life. Dreams guide your personal growth and help in achieving your full potential. Jung also believes that the dream's manifest content is just as significant and revealing as the latent content. By simply discussing what is currently going on in your life, it can help you interpret and unlock the cryptic images of your dreams. Jung's method of dream interpretation is placed more confidently on the dreamer. He believes that you all possess the necessary tools to interpret your own dreams. There is no one correct way to interpret a dream. The meaning of your dreams is a personal judgment and is up to you on how to interpret them. Whatever interpretation feels right to you is most significant and more important than what someone else thinks or believes.

A contemporary of Chaucer's from an entirely different culture, Hafiz, or Shams ud-Din Muhammad of Shiraz, was born in 1320 AD and died in 1389 AD. Hafiz's *Diwan* is made up of many poems that on the surface seem to be about love and wine, but are in fact, as mentioned above, meant to be read as something deeper when the symbolism is considered and the mystical

theology behind it. It is in this way that we can compare the themes running throughout the poems of Hafiz to those in Chaucer's *The Book of the Duchess*. By doing so, we can hopefully start to see similarities in themes and ideas in the selected pieces of work from both the Western and near-Eastern culture. The poems in Hafiz's *Diwan* are not given names therefore the selected poems will be referred to by their numbers as a reference point. I have also closely referenced the poems from the *Diwan* because they are not as well known or as easily accessible as Chaucer's works.

Just as the European Middle Ages had a theory of four-fold allegorical interpretation of Scripture (which Dante applied to his own poetry as explained in his letter to Can Grande della Scala⁹), I feel that the poems of Hafiz can be read on at least three levels of significance: 1. Face-value; songs in celebration of wine and love; 2. Sexual symbolism and Sufi mystical theology; 3.

⁹ Dante describes the four meanings, or senses, of allegory in his epistle to Can Grande della Scala. He says the allegories of his work are not simple, but:

Rather, it may be called "polysemous", that is, of many senses [allegories]. A first sense derives from the letters themselves, and a second from the things signified by the letters. We call the first sense "literal" sense, the second the "allegorical", or "moral" or "anagogical". To clarify this method of treatment, consider this verse: *When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a barbarous people: Judea was made his sanctuary, Israel his dominion* (Psalm 113). Now if we examine the letters alone, the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt in the time of Moses is signified; in the allegory, our redemption accomplished through Christ; in the moral sense, the conversion of the soul from the grief and misery of sin to the state of grace; in the anagogical sense, the exodus of the holy soul from slavery of this corruption to the freedom of eternal glory.. they can all be called allegorical.

Compliments to a princely patron's magnificence, or respectful approach to him for his tardiness in rewarding his poet's services.

The opening poem of the *Diwan* sets the tone for the rest of the poems to come. It discusses the theme of love and the difficulties the narrator has with it on both a physical and a spiritual level. On the physical level, the narrator seems to be dealing with unrequited love the same way the Black Knight was initially dealing with unrequited love in *The Book of the Duchess*; unlike the narrator in the *Diwan*, the Black Knight is eventually successful in his venture for love and he lives happily for a time until the object of his love dies from a serious illness. In both poems, one could argue that there is a further level of interpretation if we bring the theory of interpretation used to analyze Scripture and which Dante successfully applied to his work. After looking at Hafiz's work we can see that at least three levels of interpretation were applied. If we look closer at Hafiz's poem, we see several things of interest; the opening line of this song, which is the first poem in the *Diwan*, is derived from an Arabic poem by Yezid ibn Moawiyah, the second Khalif of the Ommiad line.

*“Arise, oh Cup-bearer, rise! And bring
To lips that are thirsting the bowl they praise,
For it seemed that love was an easy thing,
But my feet have fallen on difficult ways.”*

Hafiz was constantly admonished for taking a quotation from the works of Yezid¹⁰ and placing it at the beginning of his work, a reprimand he answered by saying that it was an ideal exercise to take from the non-believers anything valuable. This is interesting because it demonstrates the inter-textuality of the near-Eastern culture, similar to European culture, and most probably showed the mark of a well-educated person who was aware of the numerous other writers and artists surrounding him.

The last three lines of the first stanza show how miserable and how devoted the narrator is to his lady of choice.

*“The fragrance of musk in her hair that sleeps-
In the night of her hair-yet no fragrance stays
The tears of my heart’s blood my sad heart weeps.”*

We have a play on meaning upon the musk¹¹ which is acquired at the expense of the deer and the tears of blood which the lover weeps for his mistress. The narrator’s love is to the extent that the pain it is causing him feels as though it is taking his life away. The deer loses its life to provide someone with pleasure and the narrator feels as though the same is happening to him with the

¹⁰ This prince was abhorred by the Persian Shiites’. He was abhorred for two reasons, for being the leader of the Sunnis and for causing the death of Hussein, the son of Ali, who the Shiites’ saw as the rightful person next in line for the Khalifate.

¹¹ Musk is obtained from a [gland](#) of the male [musk deer](#), which is situated between its back/rectal area.

unresponsiveness of the lady in question since he is doing everything he can to please her with no success.

In the second stanza, the title which Hafiz gives to the tavern-keeper is the Old Man of the Magians. The story behind this title personifies the history of the Persian faiths and mainly represented the priest of Zoroaster, which is the first of the Persian religions. When the preachers of the Prophet took over from the priests of Zoroaster after the Muslims invaded Persia, the title of the priests developed disgrace and disrespect to the extent that it came to mean the keeper of an inn. However, it slowly regained its honorable meaning because the managers and owners of these inns were individuals who had experience with the “ways of the road and hostelry.” They gained their experience by providing services to travelers passing through, as well as learning from people who stopped for refreshment; the proprietors were able to guide others and provide them with comfort before continuing their journey. This is how the Sufis started using the old name to mean a wise old man who provided tired wayfarers on life’s road with the spiritual comfort of Sufi dogma which refreshes and comforts the soul (Bell).

In the rest of the poem, the narrator expresses his despair and how he feels as a result in relation to the world. He feels isolated and cast in the middle of a storm where he has no fixed point to prevent him from drowning. He feels even more alone because the people around him have found success in love and as a result have found their way out of the storm to calmer shores.

*“How shall my drowning voice strike their ears
Whose light-freighted vessels have reached the shore?”*

He feels ashamed that he has not been successful in love and feels that everyone is laughing at him behind his back. He ends the poem by giving the advice that once you have obtained your heart's desire, it is better to forget about everyone and everything else in the world. Just as the narrator seems to be complaining about his lack of success in love, he is also complaining about his lack of success in finding spiritual fulfillment. His depression and confusion can be explained as his lack of success in being able to stay on a certain path in order to reach a higher state of spirituality and his feeling of isolation as others find comfort in the storm could be explained as his frustration over his inability to reach that state of being that others seem to have little trouble reaching. It would also explain his feeling of shame and embarrassment; the narrator could very well feel ridiculed because he has not yet been able to do what so many others before him have been able to do. The narrator is even unable to find a safe-haven to rest in the tavern, since the tavern keeper tells him to be on his way since he has not yet reached the desired stage of spirituality; a state of unity with the Beloved.

Poem II in Hafiz's *Diwan* is a description of the narrator's quest for love. He describes his quest in the form of an allegory in which a bird of gardens-a nightingale-speaks to a newly opened rose. It seems the nightingale thinks that the rose is behaving inappropriately and tells the rose to be more modest since many roses just as beautiful have bloomed and died in that same garden.

*"The bird of gardens sang unto the rose,
New blown in the clear dawn: "Bow down thy head!
As fair as thou within this garden close,
Many have bloomed and died. She laughed and said:*

*“That I am born to fade grieves not my heart;
But never was it a true lover’s part’
To vex with bitter words his love’s repose.””*

We sense tension between the two lovers just as we sensed tension between the Black Knight and his love before she finally accepted him. The second stanza contains advice that in order to be successful in love, more often than not, humiliation is involved in the process. The lover should subject himself to misery before hoping to have any measure of success.

*“The tavern step shall be thy hostelry,
For Love’s diviner breath comes but to those
That suppliant on the dusty threshold lie.
And thou, if thou would’st drink the wine that flows
From Life’s bejeweled goblet, ruby red,
Upon thine eyelashes thine eyes shall thread
A thousand tears for this temerity.”*

We see exactly the same thing in the case of the Black Knight and his love; he goes through misery and heartache before his lady finally accepts his love and returns it. The point seems to be that in order to succeed in love you need to be able to lay your soul bare, with all its flaws and imperfections, for everyone to see; it is only in this way that you will be able to find some measure of comfort and some hope for success in the venture of love.

The third stanza of the poem sets the narrator in a magical garden that was planted by a mythical king. He continues to question the existence of love and the way to obtain it but the

wind, when questioned, cannot answer him and he is forced to continue in the same distress. It is assumed that Hafiz wrote this poem in a stunning garden belonging to Shah Shudja called the *Bagh-i-Irem*, after Shedad's legendary Paradise¹². It would be possible then to suggest that the narrator is not only looking for physical love in this poem but also spiritual love; thus laying your soul bare and humiliating yourself make more sense. In order to achieve a higher state of spirituality, these things are often required so that all sense of desire for worldly and material goods is forgotten.

Poem XIII in the *Divan* again deals with unrequited love. In the first stanza, the narrator seems to be berating the lady who fails to return his affections; he even goes so far as to insult her intelligence by telling her that if she were to hear wise words she would not be able to recognize them for what they are even though they are very clear. The narrator's feelings toward the end of the stanza are such that because of the difficulties she puts him through any other obstacles which he will be required to face in this life or the next life will not be as difficult.

¹² According to Bell, King Shedad, the grandson of Irem, planted a spectacular garden around his palace called the Garden of Irem which was supposed to compete with the Garden of Eden.

After it had been completed, he started out with a vast entourage in order to see it, however, when they were one day away from their destination they were struck down by horrific noise from heaven....it is said the city is still standing in the deserts of Aden and is kept in good condition by Providence for the purpose of serving as a monument to divine justice, even though it is invisible except on the very rare occasion when God allows it to be seen, a privilege one Colabah purported to have received in the reign of the Khalif Moawiyah. Khalif Moawiyah sent for him in order to determine whether the claim was true or not and Colabah recounted his whole escapade : as he was looking for a lost camel of his, he came upon the gates of the city which he entered only to find deserted. Being terrified because of this, he quickly grabbed some fine stones, which he showed the Khalif, and left, (Sale's Koran).

*“Lady that hast my heart within thy hand,
Thou heed’st me not; and if thou turn thine ear
Unto the wise, thou shalt not understand-
Behold the fault is thine, our words were clear.
For all the tumult in my drunken brain
Praise God! Who trieth not His slave in vain;
Nor this world nor the next shall make me fear!”*

The next stanza continues with the narrator describing his state of mind as if he has fallen into a state of depression; his heart is tired and he feels as though something inside of him is weeping which reaches the depths of his soul even though his outward appearance does not hint at his state of mind. He feels that only the saddest of songs would be able to convey his feelings properly; words do not seem to be adequate to convey his feelings.

*“My weary heart eternal silence keeps-
I know not who has slipped into my heart;
Though I am silent, one within me weeps.
My soul shall rend the painted veil apart.
Where art thou Minstrel! Touch thy saddest strings
Till clothed in music such as sorrow sings,
My mournful story from thy zither sweeps.”*

The narrator was so enthralled with his lady that he did not even appreciate the beauty of nature around him; he was even unable to sleep at night because he would be thinking and dreaming of her until he felt drunk with the lack of sleep. He again makes reference to the tavern that is full of cheer and which seems to represent a safe haven for him.

*“ Lo, not at any time I lent mine ear
To hearken to the glories of the earth;
Only thy beauty to mine eyes was dear.
Sleep has forsaken me, and from the birth
Of night till day I weave bright dreams of thee;
Drunk with a hundred nights of revelry,
Where is the tavern that sets forth such cheer!”*

The fourth stanza of the poem deals more specifically with the narrator’s heart and how it has been affected by the ordeal of unrequited love. The narrator describes his heart as a hermit which weeps blood because of its anguish. Reference is made to the cloister floor which may represent the narrator’s body which means the narrator considers his body sacred; this idea seems to be proven true because in the same stanza he wishes his body to be cleaned spiritually because “the worshippers of fire/ have bowed down and magnified my name,” it isn’t clear if the worshippers of fire are supposed to be sinners and that is why the narrator wishes to be spiritually cleansed or if the worshippers of fire are people who embrace life and therefore have embraced his work and glorified it by spreading the narrator’s poetry thereby immortalizing the poet through his work.

*“My heart, sad hermit, stains the cloister floor
With drops of blood, the sweat of anguish dire;
Ah, wash me clean, and o’er my body pour
Love’s generous wine! The worshippers of fire
Have bowed down and magnified my name,
For in my heart there burns a living flame,
Transpiercing Death’s impenetrable door.”*

The last stanza of the poem deals with the poet's euphoria and his renewed sense of hope since his lady has finally declared her love for him. Her proclamation is what has given the narrator hope and has touched him to the core of his being to the extent that he still feels the effect of it the next day. The effects of her love go so far that, for the narrator, it is like a lifeline in the wilderness of life that enables him to continue with renewed hope.

*“What instrument through last night’s silence rang?
My life into his lay the minstrel wove,
And filled my brain with the sweet song he sang.
It was the proclamation of thy love
That shook the strings of Life’s most secret lyre,
And still my breast heaves with last night’s desire,
For countless echoes from that music sprang.
And ever, since the time that Hafiz heard
His Lady’s voice, as from a rocky hill
Reverberates the softly spoken word,
So echoes of desire his bosom fill.”*

The poem could also be looked at on another level as the narrator searching for spiritual fulfillment without having much success at this point in his life. He is kept awake at nights trying to reach that stage of spirituality that would allow him to achieve a state of unity with the Beloved. It is this lack of success that keeps him frustrated and yearning for something that others seem to be able to find easily but eludes him. The fact that the narrator finally reaches the

stage he has been longing to reach for so long is what gives him a sense of renewed hope that makes him feel that he can cope with the hardships of life.

Poem XVIII in the *Divan* again deals with an elusive lady who seems to constantly avoid the attentions of her admirers. In the stanza below, the lady's admirers mourn the fact that she does not return any of their attentions or attempts to gain her favor. The Persians uses blue as their color of mourning. Hafiz uses this to his advantage when he compares weeping lovers dressed in clothes of mourning to a bed of violets. They are similar because, just as the flowers dip in the wind, the lovers hang their heads when their beloved passes by without noticing them or their pursuits.

*“Slaves of thy shining eyes are even those
That diadems of might and empire bear;
Drunk with the wine that from thy red lip flows,
Are they that e'en the grape's delight forswear.
Drift, like the wind across a violet bed,
Before thy many lovers, weeping low,
And clad like violets in blue robes of woe,
Who feel thy wind-blown hair and bow the head.”*

The second stanza deals more with how through poetry, the secret of lovers cannot be kept since it is the most common topic of the poet. The narrator is trying to tell the lady that she should be aware of the many admirers whom she has and how they neglect their rest and peace of mind in order to come and gaze at her.

“Thy messenger the breath of dawn, and mine

*A stream of tears, since lover and beloved
Keep not their secret; through my verses sine,
Though other lays my flower's grace have proved
And countless nightingales have sung thy praise.
When veiled beneath thy curls thou passest, see,
To right and leftward those that welcome thee
Have bartered peace and rest on thee to gaze!"*

In stanza three the narrator switches to a more religious tone when he says that God's mercy is only seen for sinners and that those who already know God by heart will be the ones to inherit Paradise.

*"But thou that knowst God by heart, away!
Wine-drunk, love-drunk, we inherit Paradise,
His mercy is for sinners; hence and pray
Where wine thy cheek red as red ergwhan dyes,
And leave the cell to faces sinister.
Oh Khizr, whose happy feet bathed in life's fount,
Help one who toils afoot-the horsemen mount
And hasten on their way; I scarce can stir."*

The narrator calls on "Khizr", a messenger that the Muslims paralleled to Phineas, Elias, and St. George by stating that his spirit passed through all three. He became immortal after discovering the fountain of life and drinking from it. Hafiz saw the prophet Al Khizr as one of his special guardians. The reason for this is because, in his youth, Hafiz fell in love with a beautiful girl of Shiraz called Shakh-i-Nahat. In order to win her love, he determined to complete a forty night

vigil in order to have the gift of poetry bestowed upon him by Al Khizr. This would mean that he would have to go to a special place called Pir-i-Sabz (Old Green Man) in order to hold his vigil; on the fortieth night, AlKhizr would appear to him and bestow the gift of poetry on him. For thirty-nine days Hafiz went through the process of walking under the windows of Shakh-i-Nahat followed by a meal and then sleep; at night he would keep watch in *Pir-i-Sabz*, undisturbed by the apparition of a fierce lion. Eventually, on the fortieth morning, Shakh-i-Nahat decided she preferred a clever man to a rich man and called Hafiz to her in order to inform him that she had decided to accept his proposal. Although he had achieved his original goal, Hafiz now wanted to become a poet and completed his forty night vigil. On the same night, an old man (assumed to be Al Khizr) wearing green clothes appeared to him and brought him a cup of the water of immortality.

The last stanza of the poem has the narrator wishing to stay ensnared in the web of the lady's spell since this is where he feels safe and the most free. The narrator also warns listeners that those in love, whether it be spiritual or earthly love, even the most proud of people will humble themselves before they have any success in the matter.

*“Ah loose me not! Ah, set not Hafiz free
From out the bondage of thy gleaming hair!
Safe only those, safe, and at liberty,
That fast enchained in thy linked ringlets are.
But from the image of his dusty cheek
Learn this from Hafiz: proudest heads shall bend,
And dwellers on the threshold of a friend
Be crowned with the dust that crowns the meek.”*

If we look at the narrator's complaints from the point of view of someone who is spiritually in love then we have new meanings for the poem opening up to us. The lady becomes something higher, a spiritual figure who represents God and to whom people want to become close to in order to achieve that higher state of spirituality that would guarantee them a place in Paradise. The humbleness that the narrator speaks of in the last stanza is the humbleness that every devout religious person feels when they are in awe of God.

Poem XXIV in the *Divan* has a more pronounced tone of despair. The narrator seems to have given up all vestige of a civilized appearance since his robe is dirty and his book lies forgotten as he continually drinks wine in an attempt to forget his sorrows. His heart is thick with dust since his love has been unreturned and ignored for such a long time; the narrator prays to God for a sign that will give him renewed hope to continue with his life.

*“Not one is filled with madness like to mine
In all the taverns! My soiled robe lies here,
There my neglected book, both pledged for wine.
With dust my heart is thick, that should be clear,
A glass to mirror forth the Great King's face;
One ray of light from out Thy dwelling-place
To pierce my night, oh God! And draw me near.”*

The same tone continues into the second stanza in which the poet sheds tears of grief which serve to nourish the figure of his beloved, “From out mine eyes unto my garment's hem/A river

flows; perchance my cypress tree¹³/Beside that stream may rear her lofty stem, /Watering her roots with tears.” (Hafiz XXIV lines 8-11). As a result of his lady’s callousness, the narrator longs for wine in which he can drown his sorrows. The tone changes suddenly in the next stanza and the narrator seems to have a renewed sense of hope and vigor because he renounces wine and says,

*“Nay, by the hand that sells me wine, I vow
No more the brimming cup shall touch my lips,
Until my mistress with her radiant brow
Adorns my feast- (lines 15-18)”*

This new tone of vigor continues for the rest of the poem as the narrator warns people from following people who are blind to the ultimate truth and to illustrate this, the narrator tells listeners about a Christian singing about his doubt in the Resurrection.

*“Yet heed them not! Those that are clear of sight
Follow not them to whom all light’s denied.
Before the tavern door a Christian sang
To sound of pipe and drum, what time the earth
Awaited the white dawn, and gaily rang
Upon mine ear those harbingers of mirth:
“If the True Faith be such as thou dost say,
Alas! My Hafiz, that this sweet Today*

¹³ The cypress tree is symbolically important for Sufis because of its continued greenness and comforting freshness. The tree symbolizes the ability to become whole since it has male and female principles; as a result the cypress frequently appears in iconography. In Sufi poetry, the beauty of the body of the beloved is symbolized as a cypress tree. However, in Europe it is associated with death. In Southern Europe it is the standard cemetery tree (Nadalian).

Should bring unknown Tomorrow to the birth!””

Shah Shudja did not always see eye to eye with Hafiz due to several reasons. One of them being that he was envious of the poet, and another because he was the student of Abu Ishaac, Shah Shudja's former rival. Because of this the King always looked for ways of holding Hafiz back. Because of the last couplet of this poem, he claimed Hafiz did not believe in the Resurrection and called him a heretic in front of the Ulema. Hafiz managed to think of a way out of the situation which was to insert another couplet that stated that the lines were not of his opinion but that of a Christian. This clever move served both to save Hafiz and to also thwart the King. It also earned him praise from the Ulema because it served as a blow on the behalf of Islam to the infidel.

Poem XXXVII in the *Divan* is consistent with the rest of the poems in the collection; it has the same frustrated tone and the content deals with the narrator still trying to gain the attention and love of a particular lady. The narrator goes to extremes and boasts that even though others find it easy to move on, he is unable to do so and vows that he will continue to love the lady even when he is dead and the ability to love is gone. When he is near death, his soul does not allow his body to give up without having had one kiss from his lady; the narrator questions the lady's callousness and her lack of mercy that, once given, will enable him to rest easy. He feels that even after he is dead he will still long and burn for her. His frustration reaches the point that he resorts to praying to a higher being to have mercy on all men and women and to relieve them of all their distress. In the last stanza there is an interesting image; the image of the hair of the beloved being entangling and entrapping for the lover is used

prolifically in Persian poetry. Her long hair is commonly seen as snakes and the curls as hooks which trap and damage the lover's heart. This image is not strange to Western literature, and is seen often in the Old and New testaments of the Bible.

William Christian has devoted a special study to the spread of the cult of Mary in Europe (1966). He notes the following trends: 1. an increased tendency to replace sanctuaries of Christ by sanctuaries of the Virgin, a movement which began in Latin Europe and moved northwards; 2. an increased tendency to replace the titles of Saint Mary, Dommarie, Madonna, with titles aggrandizing her importance-Nuestra Senora, Notre Dame; 3. an increased tendency to address her as an intercessor with her son; and 4. an increased emphasis given to the doctrine of immaculate conception, removing her from the company of other men conceived in original sin, and granting her a status paralleling that of Christ, hence capable of bringing salvation. He notes that the main bearers of this variant of mariology were the reformist monastic orders, especially the Cistercians and Franciscans, and the military-religious orders. He expresses his conviction that in this new role Mary served as a symbol of order: of widened order on the village level, where her cult serves as a means-on the ceremonial level-of setting aside conflicts, and of widened order on the level of state and church. During the first phase of this development, public order was increased through the growth of multiple associations into an orderly social and political infra-structure, connecting a pluralistic church and state. This movement often originated in the religious sphere; it wove a set of connective tissue between church and state; and it balanced the claims of the two institutional realms. The image of Mary seems to reflect this triple experience.

There is also a female element in Islam which corresponds to some extent to Mary, in the female figure of Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet. The figure of Fatima received the greatest elaboration under Shiite auspices where it may well represent the renaissance of an earlier dualist Iranian tradition. Nevertheless, Fatima is of general importance in Islam, especially in folk Islam, even in Sunni areas. The symbolism of Fatima is complex. Daughter of the Prophet, who had no male heir, she bore to Ali the only male progeny of Muhammad. Like all, she and her children suffered defeat and death at the hands of political rivals, thus extinguishing Muhammad's line as a continuing political force. Nevertheless, she is the fictive "mother" of the descendants of the Prophet, the *shorfa* (sing., *sherif*) who bear the *baraka* or power of the Prophet and who furnish a continuing elite from which both the heads of *tariqas* and political leaders can be drawn. She is also, in Shiite variants of Islam, the female ancestor of the *Mahdi* who is to come and who will also bear the name Muhammad. In prayer she is addressed as *omm abiha*, mother of your father, a greeting used in ordinary discourse when indicating that a woman has a son who bears the name of his mother's father.

The concept of Fatima is thus ordered by agnatic thinking. She is the mediator between past and future, because it is through her that the fictive spiritual line of the Prophet continues into the miraculous future. The concept is agnatic, moreover, because she appears not in bilateral balance with the Prophet, as Mary does with Christ, but as the point of intersection between two agnatic lines, that of the Prophet and that of Ali, his son-in-law; the relation of affinity becomes conceptually merged with that of agnation, since Ali's descendants are merged with the Prophet's line. Moreover, at the end of days she will not appear as the benevolent mother of men, but with distraught hair to ask vengeance for her murdered children—a symbol of the wrath of God, but

also a symbol of agnatic vengeance. In this way, the concept of Fatima is subordinated to the agnatic principle. The descendants of the Prophet are to act as mediators among men, as agents laboring on behalf of alliance against clashing solidary groups. But they do so not as representatives of an autonomously organized Church, utilizing a female idiom; the symbolic charter of their activity is subordinated to the principle of agnatic incorporation (Wolf 298). It is in this way we can see the similarities of the texts in this chapter. Both of sets of texts deal with trying to attain the approval of a female figure; with the Chaucer text, this approval means gaining approval of both church and state. With the Hafiz text, this approval also means gaining the approval of a higher order.

A Comparison of Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* and Attar's *Conference of the Birds*

The Parliament of Fowls (1382) is generally accepted as an occasional poem written for St. Valentine's Day as a court entertainment. It is also another of Chaucer's dream visions, with a slightly comic narrator. In *The Parliament of Fowls*, Chaucer assumes an instance, the presence of listeners with certain anticipations, and his goal is to amuse. The poem is a joke which has elements of seriousness and its humor mainly stems from the surprising way in which traditional material is handled. The system of classification by style or source is rendered useless as the normal attitudes and responses which are usual for a standard situation are let down as soon as they are established (Hutchinson 144). Chaucer inspires his refined listeners to assume they are about to hear a love poem, told in the finest customs of oratory. This assumption is strengthened as the narrator discusses the workings of the god of love who both aids and torments lovers. After this almost accidental reference to his intelligence, the narrator starts to discuss his interest in books and their value in a controlled and scholarly way. In this way, when he starts to talk about what he has read in a certain book, his listeners can expect to hear a courtly love poem (Hutchinson). But they are suddenly told that the book is *Tullyus of the Drem of Scipioun*, Cicero's *Somnium Scipionis* which, with its commentary by Macrobius, was well-known, but not at all the inspiration from which love-poems are fashioned. Its instruction is concerned with morals rather than social particulars. After talking about the *Somnium* in detail, the listeners are left feeling deceived. Their assumption that they are going to be hearing about the art of love is proven to have been superfluous. The theme is no longer of Eros, but of

Agape¹⁴ and a totally different sphere of "miracles and crewel yre" in which divine Providence rather than fortune is made evident. Secondly the narrator, who by his art and his implied knowledge encouraged confidence, now seems strangely unaware that the catholicity of his reading has led him far from the courtly celebration of St. Valentine's Day. Now the narrator's carefree flow begins to breed distrust, not confidence, in his hearers (Hutchinson 144). The narrator passes through the idealized landscape that leads to Venus's dark temple, and then to the bright sunlight where Dame Nature presides over the great flock of birds gathered, as is their custom on St. Valentine's Day, to choose their mates. This process involves a great deal of debate, and of particular interest are the different kinds of language that are appropriate to different degrees of the social hierarchy. This subject matter, combined with the narrator's less obtrusive role as an observer of the avian parliament, means that the poem seems less focused upon the individual and more concerned with corporate social issues (St John 124). At this gathering, he sees the three tercel eagles, who plead for the hand of the formel at such length that finally the birds of "lowere kynde" raucously object and launch into a comic parliamentary debate, rich in insults which Nature herself must finally bring to an end. As for the three tercels, none wins the formel; with maidenly reserve, she defers her choice until the following year.

14 Agapē (Gk. ἀγάπη), is one of several Greek words translated into English as love. A variety of contemporary and ancient sources, including Biblical authors have used the word in different ways. It is thought by a large number of people that this word illustrates divine, unconditional, self-sacrificing, active, volitional, and thoughtful love. Forms of the word have been used by Greek philosophers and other ancient authors at the time of Plato to represent love for family, or the enjoyment of a particular activity. On the other hand, the word philia was used to represent brotherhood or affection of a non-sexual nature, along with eros-affection of a sexual nature—normally between two unequal partners. Although the term agape is hardly used in ancient manuscripts, it was used to refer to the self-sacrificing love of God for humanity by the early Christians, which they reciprocated and practiced towards God and each other.

That decision at least frees the other birds to choose, and the dream ends with their joyful roundel to welcome the coming spring. Yet it leaves the dreamer unsatisfied, and he returns to his books, still hoping to learn something “for to fare the bet.” The narrator of *The Parliament of Fowls* initially presents himself as one who is familiar with ‘Love’ and what Love is:

*“The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne,
Th’assay so hard, so sharp the conquerynge,
The dredful joye alwey that slit so yerne:
Al this mene I by Love, that my felynge
Astonyeth with his wonderful werkyng
So sore, iwis, that whan I on hym thynke
Nat wot I wel wher that I flete or synke. (1-7)”*

He is clearly aware of certain conventions that constitute *fin amors*; according to Denomy, Courtly Love is distinguished from other kinds of love by two principles- 1. That love is an ennobling force and, inseparable from this, that the woman loved is elevated above the lover; 2. That love is not acceptance in the attainment of the beloved but a ceaseless desire that is unappeased ¹⁵(Silverstein 118). The idea that it is a ‘craft’ or art, and that it requires enormous

¹⁵ For the intellectual background out of which, as he thinks, Courtly Love arose, Denomy returns to the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus, some aspects of which had already been exploited by the critics, notably Kate Axhausen. This philosophy, unlike the Augustinian-Bernardine, divides man's body from the soul, which is divine, and sees the soul's life on earth as a constant soaring desire to reach the One, which is frustrated by bodily imprisonment. Elements of Plotinianism descend to the Latin Middle Ages by way of various secular writers, including Macrobius, and through the Christian adaptations of Dionysius the Areopagite and John the Scot; are present among the

dedication for uncertain reward is typical of many courtly narratives. But when he says that ‘my felynge / Astonyeth’, ‘So sore, iwys, that when I on hym thynke / Nat wot I wel wher that I flete or synke’ it is apparent that Love is an object of reflection for the narrator, rather than one of immediate experience, and as such he finds it difficult to understand. He goes on to admit that it is only through books that he knows about Love:

*“For al be that I knowe nat Love in dede,
Ne wot how that he quiteth folk here hyre,
Yit it happeth me ful ofte in bokes reede
Of his myrakles and his crewel yre.
There rede I wel he wol be lorde and syre;
I dar nat seyn, his strokes been so sore,
But ‘God save swich a lord!’ I can na moore. (8-11)”*

His attempt to understand Love through reading is not a systematic affair. ‘Yit happeth me ful ofte in bokes rede’ suggests that he is discovering things about Love in an unstructured manner without actually experiencing it for himself. Rather, he is experiencing love through others. This means that there is a certain freedom to form his own ideas about the kind of thing that Love is, and this is reflected in his language. The words ‘quiteth folk here hyre’ may well reflect his individual approach to fine loving. Rather than conceiving of Love in the older terms of a purely feudal society, in which Love might demand service from a vassal as of right, the narrator

Albigensian heretics in southern France, who may have been influenced also by John the Scot; and form a base for Arabic Neo-Platonism (Silverstein 118).

sees the relationship in terms of a non-hereditary contract. The words ‘quiteth’ and ‘hyre’ imply monetary payment for service in this context. This casts Love in the role of a lord who must pay for his servant’s loyalty, therefore giving the servant a greater degree of power, and making the business of love seem more conventional than natural. This is also characteristic of courtly love in which the lover pays homage to the beloved and raises them to a level that gives the beloved power over the lover.

It could be that the narrator of the *Parliament* conceives of the relationship between Love and his servants as less binding, because the narrator wants to emphasize his lack of real experience of Love, and his inability to understand the all-consuming nature of the experience as described in courtly love literature. However, he has at least demonstrated his awareness of certain conventions of *fin amors* that will prove to be of central importance to the aims of the Parliament later in the poem.

The narrator then returns to the question of literature, telling us of another text that he has recently read:

*“Of usage-what for lust and what for lore-
On bokes rede I ofte, as I yow tolde.
But wherefore that I speke al this? Nat yoore
Agon it happede me for to beholde
Upon a bok, was write with lettres olde
And therupon, a certeyn thing to lerne,
The longe day ful faste I redde and yerne. (15-21)”*

There does not seem to be any reason for reading this particular text: ‘it happede me for to behold’ suggests a merely random selection which is a convention in this type of text. The text is the *Dream of Scipio* by Cicero¹⁶ and its subject matter is civic duty, something not directly relevant to the narrator’s previous musings. The thrust of Cicero’s sentence is condensed by the narrator as he informs us of Africanus’s counsel given in a dream to Scipio:

*“Thanne preyde hym Scipion to telle hym al
The way to come into that hevene blisse.
And he seyde, ‘know thysel first immortal,
And loke ay besyly thow weche and wysse
To commune profit, and thow shalt not mysse
To comen swiftly to that place deere
That ful of blysse is and of soules cleere’. (71-77)”*

The significant idea here is working for ‘commune profit’, or the good of the community. But it is not clear yet to the narrator what the implications of this are, and he expresses some degree of consternation because the sentence of the text is not what he is looking for:

*“And to my bed I gan me for to dress,
Fulfyld of thought and busy hevynesse;
For bothe I hadde thyng which that I nolde,
And eke I ne hadde that thyng that I wolde. (87-90)”*

¹⁶ Refer to chapter one for details about text.

It seems that he is looking to learn something specific from his reading because he does not have what he desires ('that thyng that I wolde'). Since in the opening lines the narrator is preoccupied with the ways of love, it is reasonable to suppose that the thing that he seeks concerns love too. Cicero's civic poem does not therefore seem to be immediately relevant. However, in the course of the narrator's dream the business of love comes to be seen from the perspective of 'commune profit', in such a way as to demonstrate the intimate relation between civic duty and issues of personal desire (St John 127-128).

As it is, the narrator reads with a definite purpose in mind, but he is open to Chance to dictate the course of his reading (lines 10, 18). This strategy means that Chaucer is able to bring into play a wide range of source material for the vision, and thereby compensate for the limitations that would otherwise accompany the device of an inexperienced narrator:

*"For out of olde felde, as men seyth,
Cometh al this newe corn from yer to yere,
And out of olde bokes, in good feyth,
Cometh al this newe science that men lere. (22-25)"*

He metaphorically ploughs through old narratives that provide fields of new possibilities, thereby widening his horizons of experience. As he does so the narrator registers the profound impact that certain narratives have upon his consciousness: 'Al this mene I by Love, that my felyng / Astonyeth with his wonderful werkyng' (4-5). What the narrator is acknowledging here is that consciousness or 'felyng' is in some way affected by what is read. This brings to mind *Reader*

Response Theory and horizons of expectation in which readers approach a text with preconceived ideas about it and the subject matter. Whether the word ‘Astonyeth’ implies that this is perceived to be a positive thing to the narrator is unclear. But what we do know is that the dream, which is constructed out of the impressions made upon the narrator’s ‘felyng’, shows that his horizon of expectation has changed. Certain, as yet unspecified texts, have actualized his consciousness of courtly love, and the *Dream of Scipio* has actualized some form of political consciousness as will be shown later in the chapter. The *Dream of Scipio* is his most recent reading experience, and this text will provide a paradigm through which some of his previous reading is re-experienced and reorganized in his own mind. The poem therefore describes a revisionary process, an unfolding of different aspects of consciousness that correspond with the acquisition of new knowledge. In an article by David Aers, it was stated that H.M. Leicester maintains that Chaucer was aware of the variety, depth, and multiplicity of the classical traditions. He goes on to say that because these traditions fail to merge, the components of the dream become projections of various parts of Chaucer’s consciousness (Aers 2). It is these projections that are indirectly influencing the narrator and affecting him as he reads the *Dream of Scipio*; the narrator is trying to learn about love, but instead of reading about love, or courtly love, he reads a political text that causes him to look at the matter of falling in love differently. The same article by Leicester further argues that the *Parliament of Fowls* places focus on, “the disruptive force of individual personality” and, “the breakdown of order and communication produced by the very existence of differing individual styles” (2).

The garden which the narrator now describes is itself the product of a set of well established conventions. Africanus’s assurances are immediately supported by the narrator’s

delightful impressions of the place, ‘But, Lord, so I was glad and wel begoon!’ (171). He describes the trees in a way that is also conventional, but which serves to create a naturalistic effect by emphasizing the practical qualities of the different kinds of wood: ‘The bylder ok, and ek the hardy asshe; /The piler elm, the cofre unto carayne; /The boxtre pipere, holm to whippes lashe’ (176-78). These qualities serve to create a point of contact between dream and reality, and with the description of the elm as the wood for making coffins, and the yew for making arrows (180) they do so in a way that connects with the sober tone of the *Dream of Scipio*. The general feeling in the garden, however, is one of delight, it is a locus amoenus¹⁷:

*“A gardyn saw I ful of blosmy bowes
 Upon a ryver, in a grene mede,
 There as swetnesse everemore inow is,
 With floures white, blewe, yelwe, and rede,
 And colde welle-stremes, nothyng dede,
 That swymmen ful of smale fishes lighte,
 With fynnes rede and skales sylver bryghte. (183-89)”*

When thinking about the trees in terms of their practical value the narrator’s mind is open to a wide range of impressions associated with human industry and practices. But when he views the garden without recourse to experience in the real world he is conscious merely of its

¹⁷ Locus amoenus refers to an idealized place of safety or comfort. It is usually a beautiful, shady lawn or open woodland, sometimes with connotations of Eden. A locus amoenus will have three basic elements: trees, grass, and water. Often, the garden will be in a remote place and function as a landscape of the mind.

vitality and beauty. It seems to be a place beyond the strivings and anxieties of humankind in this description, with its ‘sweetnesse evermore’ and ‘nothyn dede’. The description of the river as ‘swymmen ful of smale fushes lighte’ emphasizes the way in which this place is teeming with life, nothing is dead or in decay. With the description of the birds that ‘synge, / With voys of aungel in here armonye’ (191) and ‘instruments of strenges in acord’ with their ‘ravyshyng swetnesse’ (197-98), there is a complete and perfect consummation of the senses, none are left unfulfilled, and there is a consequent feeling of well being and happiness:

*“Th’air of that place so attempre was
That nevere was grevaunce of hot ne cold.
There wex ek every holsom spice and gras;
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. (204-10)”*

These feelings are of course conventional since the experience of such a garden is a common feature of courtly poetry. But they are being re-focused according to a new paradigm: we are meant to relate this ‘joye more a thousandfold’ to the ‘blysfyl place’ that Africanus described to Scipio:

*“Thanne preyede hym Scipion to telle hym al
The way to come into that heven blisse.
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 ful of blysse is and of soules cleere’. (71-77)”*

Chaucer is re-focusing the delights of courtly poetry through the practical lens of a Roman civic poem. There is therefore a revision of the narrator’s previous orientation to such delights of poetry. Rather than simply enjoying these descriptions and aesthetic effects as ends in themselves, they are being used as an incentive to reconsider one’s responsibilities in the real world (St John 134-135). They can also be seen as a way to remind the readers of what they can achieve in the after-life if they fulfill their responsibilities in earthly matters; the garden which the narrator describes is a place of temptation and readers would experience *Felix Culpa* if they managed to get there.

The narrator tells us that Nature looks like the figure described by Alain de Lille in his *Complaint of Nature*¹⁸. However, she is less overpowering in comparison to the awesome

¹⁸ Alain de Lille had a very widespread reputation during his lifetime and his knowledge, more varied than profound, caused him to be called *Doctor universalis*. Among his very numerous works two poems entitle him to a distinguished place in the [Latin literature](#) of the Middle Ages; one of these, the *De planctu naturae* (*The Complaint of Nature*), is an ingenious satire on the vices of humanity.

demigoddess of Alain's poem. In the *Complaint* the entire natural realm responds to the presence of Nature and the narrator is quite overcome:

“After I had looked on her a time, not far distant from me, I fell on my face, prostrated by stupor of mind and all buried in the delirium of ecstasy, and the power of my senses imprisoned; and, neither in life or in death, I struggled between the two. (6-10)”

By having the narrator disturbed in such a profound manner, Alain ensures that we are made conscious of his limitations as a reporter. This means that, if we are to trust what he tells us, then the frailties of his sense and consciousness must be overcome. Alain achieves this by having Nature communicate with the narrator via images that his mind can comprehend:

“When Nature saw that I had returned to myself, she depicted for my mental perception the image of a real voice, and by this brought into actual being words which had been, so to speak, archetypes ideally preconceived. (16-20)”

The fact that the narrator is in such a disturbed state suggests that the figure of Nature is too much for him to take in, just as the figure of the Beloved would be too much for him to take in as well. In this way, the Beloved, and therefore Nature, transform their message into a medium which the narrator can more easily perceive; a voice which brings to life the images which were previously introduced to the narrator's mind.

Chaucer's Nature is a literary figure with political associations, another aspect of the narrator's earlier reading that is affected by the paradigm provided by Cicero. These latent political dimensions of Alain's Nature which Chaucer builds upon are apparent in the outset of the *Complaint*:

“I change laughter to tears, joy to sorrow applause to lament, mirth to grief, when I behold the decrees of Nature in abeyance; when society is ruined and destroyed by the monster of sensual love; when Venus, fighting against Venus, makes men women; when with her magic art she unmans men. (1-6)”

When 'the decrees of Nature' are held 'in abeyance', then 'society is ruined and destroyed by the monster of sensual love'. For Alain, homosexuality is the chief symptom of social decay. But this opposition between 'the decrees of Nature' and 'the monster of sensual love' or false Venus, is what the *Parliament of Fowls* presents as its central dialectic. Whether this is in the manner of a straightforward opposition between Nature and Venus is a matter for debate. But it is possible to see how the association of Nature with society at the beginning of Alain's poem, is being associated with the words of Africanus in the mind of Chaucer's narrator. For the narrator at least, Africanus's account of those who work for 'commune profit' set against the 'breaker of the lawe' and 'likerous' folk, is a paradigm through which the *Complaint of Nature* can be reviewed and re-represented in a new aesthetic form; one which is less determinate and allows more room for interpretation and debate.

Since the narrator of the *Parliament* reads Alain's Nature as a figure through whom a stable society receives its prompting and natural laws, he has her preside over a gathering of birds whose society is potentially unstable and who look to her to provide a facility (a parliament) within which conflict can be resolved. In describing the arrangement of the birds the narrator draws attention to rank:

*“That is to seyn, the foules of ravyne
Weere hyst set, and thanne the foules smale
That teen, as hem Nature wold enclyne,
As worm or thyng of which I telle no tale;
And water-foul sat lowest in the dale;
But foul that lyveth by seed sat on the green,
And that so fele that wonder was to sene. (323-29)”*

This description suggests a coming together of the different strata of society. The 'foules of ravyne' are 'hyst set' and would seem to represent the aristocracy. The 'foules smale' are too base to equate with gentles since they eat 'worm or thyng of which I telle no tale', something that is not in keeping with the ideals of courtliness. And since the waterfowl are set 'lowest in the dale' they would seem to represent the lowest in society. The seedfowl are a large group, 'so fele that wonder was to sene' and their location is ill-defined as an indicator of rank. The 'foul that lyveth by seed sat on the grene', but are they above the 'foules smale', and the waterfowl, or below them? It is only in the course of the speeches that we realize that they could be gentles too and might be taken to represent the social group to which Chaucer himself belonged, the wealthy merchant class, and perhaps also clerks.

Chaucer's method of fairness, however, does not involve simply an allegorical representation of medieval society. The poem does open up the garden to include non-gentle elements in the form of the lower birds, but in the course of the parliament they are negatively portrayed. This makes the poem seem even more elitist than texts that expressly exclude non-

gentles, since the lower birds are presented as incapable of contributing positively to the debate. The poem therefore appears on the surface to be an argument for excluding such groups from political participation by demonstrating their inadequacy in debate which requires education and training. Chaucer is presenting us with different models of language and conduct, and is actually leaving the reader to decide which type of bird they want to identify with. In other words he democratizes this courtly space by opening it up to the reader, be they 'lered' or 'lewed', and giving them the opportunity to recognize that the refined conduct of the eagles is best for their society as a whole. This is because their attitude enables them to act with regard to 'commune profit'. Of course the poem is written for an audience that is literate and educated and is therefore constrained to utilize narrative forms and language that pertained to the social elite. The extent to which it could ever have applied to the 'lewed' was always limited. But even so, Chaucer's use of Africanus's speech is evidence that he desires to extend the territory and language of courtliness to include those who show due respect for the values and conduct that are beneficial to social harmony. The seedfowl, therefore, can be considered as a bridging element in terms of the social allegory (St.John 143). The purpose of presenting these different levels of society could be to point out that it is difficult to achieve the level of conduct which is necessary to reach a level high enough to reach unity with Nature or the Beloved; especially for the working class or peasants in spite of the changing social structure.

There are considerable obstacles to harmony in the avian assembly, and these function as a counterbalance to the socially beneficial ideals exemplified by the language of the birds of prey. Apart from the potentially divisive reality of rank, the different natures of the birds themselves are also a barrier to their coming together. The way in which Chaucer devotes

considerable space and energy to the different species, drawing out their antisocial qualities, suggests that he is keen to acknowledge the impediments to a peaceful and successful parliament. There is the ‘goshawk’ that ‘doth pyne/ To bryddes for his outrageous ravyne’, the ‘chough’ that is a ‘thef’, the ‘false lapwyng’, ‘ful of trecherye’, and the ‘stare, the conseyl can bewrye’ (336-64). This full recognition of reasons for possible disruption are particularly challenging in the context of a parliament, because it is difficult to see what protocols might enable the birds to transcend their natures and engage in productive dialogue. They do serve however to enhance Nature’s role as one who can draw together contradictory elements into a meaningful unity. Indeed this is fundamental to her role in creation as a whole:

*“Nature, the vicaire of the almygty lord,
That hot, cod, hevvy, light, moyst, and dreye
Hath knyght by evene noumbres of accord. (379-81)”*

As the executive of God’s will in the material realm, Nature establishes opposing elements and then holds them in balance. This is also her role in the parliament. In doing so she uses the protocols of courtly love to provide a set of values that are the subject of debate in the parliament but only the upper class can be expected to behave according to these protocols. The principle of free choice for the females to consent or to refuse their suitors is a traditional one in courtly love narratives. And it is this principle which Nature affirms.

*“But natheless, in this condicioun,
Mot be the choys of everich that is heere,
That she agre to is eleccioun,
Whoso he be that shulde be hire feere.
This is oure usage alwey, fro yer to yeere,
And whoso may at this tyme have his grace
In blissful tyme he cam into this place! (407-13)”*

Affirming the paramount importance of the free choice of all subjects in a society is not, however, an unproblematic good. It might be interpreted as leaving the individual constrained in a ‘hell’ that is the free choice of other individuals. This observation helps focus the political significance of the affirmation of free choice made by Nature. We can now see the full meaning of the inscriptions on the entrance to the garden which perplexed the narrator towards the beginning of the dream vision while Africanus was guiding him. The successful suitor will know ‘grace’ and regard the garden as a ‘blysfyl place’, and the unsuccessful suitor will experience ‘the mortal strokes of the sphere’ (135). It all hinges on the free will of an individual: the aspect of the garden can change in an instant with the choice of the beloved. The political significance of this principle is heightened by the fact that all the choices that must be made are part of a hierarchal chain. Any inability to make a choice at any point in that chain affects the entire assembly, hence the right of all who take part in the debate, since their happiness is at stake. It also provides a spiritual significance in the sense that the attainment of the suitor’s desire is also seen as the attainment of the Beloved, just as the failure of the rejected suitor is

understood to mean that they still have a long way to go in order to discover the Beloved (St. John 144).

When Nature calls upon the royal eagle to speak, she calls attention to his noble qualities which she has created, and expects him to speak in a manner that accord with them:

*“The tersel egle, as that ye knowe wel,
The foul royal, above yow in degree,
The wyse and worthi, secre, trewe as stel,
Which I have formed, as ye may wel se,
In every part as it best liketh me-
It nedeth not his shap yow to devyse-
He shal first chese and speken in his gyse. (393-99)”*

This means that the language of the eagle is in accordance with his nature and feeling: he is expected to speak in a certain ‘gyse’. In the *Parliament*, the noble birds use of courtly love rhetoric is used to provide a set of protocols that can be debated by the birds, and thereby provide subject matter for political discourse. It is a fundamental premise of the bird allegory that its protagonists conform to the ordinances of Nature absolutely, as the female eagle says ‘Soth is that I am evere under your yerde, / As is everich other creature’ (640-41). This is not true of men such as the Black Knight, who can sin and therefore deviate from her designs. Because the language itself is in complete fidelity to the inner experience and nature of the speakers, we do not have to doubt the sincerity of what is said. The birds speak in a manner that conforms to, and reveals, their true natures. It is therefore a direct expression of their real intentions. The fact

that Nature, who made them and therefore knows them intimately, is actually presiding over their parliament, and she never doubts that the words of the speakers express their true thoughts and feelings, warns that we should be suspicious of the rhetoric they employ. This premise is derived from the *Complaint of Nature*. The living creatures in that poem are an example to sinful mankind precisely because they are faithful to Nature's government. There is no need, therefore, to question the integrity of the creatures that are under Nature's guidance in either the *Complaint of Nature* or the *Parliament*. Language is presented in each text as a faithful expression of intention (St. John 146). Language is used as a means of achieving that state of unity with Nature or the Beloved.

Having established that the freedom of the individual to choose is of paramount importance in the parliament, the royal eagle begins his speech, and as he does so he affirms this principle:

*“With hed enclyned and with humble cheere
This royl tersel spak, and tariede noght:
‘Unto my soverayn lady, and not my fere,
I chese, and chese with wil, and herte, and thought,
The formel on youre hond, so wel iwrought,
Whos I am al, and evere wol hire serve,
Do what hire lest, to do me lyve or sterve.’ (415-20)”*

What is being said is that the feelings are so strong that the lover is compelled to overturn the reality of their respective social positions. He is her social equal- ‘fere’ – at the very least but,

because she exerts such a powerful influence upon him he feels himself subject to her, and consents to that feeling by declaring her his 'sovereign'. Similarly, this is what happens in Sufi poetry when the poet is extolling the virtues of the object of his admiration; he gives himself completely over to her as if she is some higher being that demands his complete subservience. There is therefore an inherent element of untruth implicit in the discourse if we do not regard the language as a completely faithful expression of what is being felt inside, rather than an objective statement of affairs, and this is an important point for what follows. The eagle next says something that is less conventional when he declares: 'I chese, and chese with wil, and herte, and thought'. Traditionally the lover is compelled to love the beloved. He sees her appearance and her image is locked in his heart and he cannot break away from his attraction to her. The lover cannot critically disengage from his sense impressions and feelings in order to make a completely free and rational choice. This, however, does not seem to be the case for the eagle. He clearly feels the need to love 'I chese, and chese with wil, and herte, and thought' but, he also includes 'thought' in the process. This affirmation of thought, or reason, means that the eagle's choice to love is not necessitated in the traditional manner of most courtly love narratives. He is truly free because he is able rationally to consent to what he feels compelled to do by nature (St. John 147). This alteration of the protocols of courtly love to include reason in the process of choosing a mate further enables free will in the conduct of the birds of prey. In the case of the eagle he is freely choosing to subject himself to the female, irrespective of her response to him:

*“The formel on youre hond, so wel iwrought,
Whos I am al, and evere wol hire serve,
Do what hire lest, to do me lyve or sterve.’ (418-20)”*

The eagle’s language enables his private feelings to be expressed publicly. The language of courtly love is a transparent medium for the eagle. It allows him to express inner feelings and intentions directly to the beloved, to Nature and to the rest of the birds, and to integrate his inner experience with his immediate social context, via an elaborate set of pre-determined conventions. He is confident in his own mind that what he has been saying reveals his true intentions. If this is ever found not to be the case, then he will submit himself to the judgment and punishment of the other birds:

*“And if that I be founde to hyre untrewre,
Disobeysaunt, or willful necligent,
Avountour, or in process love a newe,
I preye to yow this be my jugement:
That with these foules I be al torent,
That ilke day that evere she me fynde
To hir untrewre, or in my gilt unkynde. (428-34)”*

The second eagle, whom we are told is ‘of lower kynde’, does not wait to be invited in his eagerness to speak. His opening lines are addressed not to the female, or Nature but to the royal eagle, and by claiming that he loves the female ‘bet than ye don, by Seint John, /Or at the

leste I love hire as wel as ye' (450-51) he serves to affirm the royal eagle's love as both his object of contention and also as a standard which he needs to attain. He has failed to establish his case on independent terms, unlike the first eagle. The oath to 'Seint John' also seems to suggest a nervous tone to his address, as if he is grasping for further support in his argument. He does not address the female as his sovereign, indeed he does not seem to address her (or Nature) at all, rather his speech is directed at his rival, and this prevents him from adopting a humble tone or posture. This could be interpreted as a lack of respect for the object of devotion that is the traditional ideal in courtly love narrative. It could also be interpreted that he has not yet achieved the level of conduct required in order to obtain the object of his devotion.

The third eagle also begins to speak without invitation. He draws attention to the content of the parliament and the urgency surrounding its affairs:

*"Now, sires, ye seen the lytel leysur here;
For every foul cryeth out to ben ago
Forth with his make, or with his lady deere. (464-66)"*

This reference to circumstances at the beginning of the speech seems inappropriate, in that it is a distraction from the business of ascertaining precisely what the eagle's intentions are towards the female. It may represent an attempt to avoid presenting these intentions in detail by invoking the need for brevity. He then says that he cannot boast long service, but claims instead that a man can serve better in half a year than some serve a full year (475-76). This seems a valid point, but having abandoned such a fundamental principle of the courtly love tradition he is forced into

self-justification- 'But I dar seyn, I am hir treweste man' (479)-since he lacks the major objective criteria for assessing the worth of his love which such principles provide.

There are, then, possible indicators as to which eagle is the most noble in intention and therefore the most suitable for the female. But more importantly we can see that the language of courtly love provides the elite birds with a set of conventions, enabling them to integrate inner experience with their immediate social context. Their private feelings are socially structured so that they become the objects of social debate. All three eagles are in competition with one another, and the strength of their feeling could be socially destructive, were they to submit to it in a non-reflexive manner. Instead these feelings are externalized by the language of courtly love and become part of a formal discursive activity, keeping the individuals integrated within an elaborate social ritual. Most of the lower birds, however, are not able to integrate their private feelings in this way, and to the narrator their 'noyse' suggests the destruction of the garden's harmony:

*"The noyse of the foules for to ben delivered
So loude rong, 'Have don, and lat us wende!'
That wel wende I the wode hadde al to sheyvered.
'Com of' they criede, 'allas, ye wol us shende!
Whan shal youre cursed pletyng have an ende?
How sholde a juge eyther parti leve
For ye or nay withouten any preve?' (491-97)"*

As with his response to Venus's temple, the narrator's reaction offers a guide to the reader as to the emotional content of what is reported. He is shocked by the severity of the outburst of the lower birds, and likens the noise they make to the wood being torn apart: 'wel wende I the wode hadde al to shyvered'. Their explosive protest is a complete contrast to the previously controlled 'gentil ple' of the eagles, and it is a faithful reflection of their less refined natures. The narrator's choice of simile helps us to appreciate the very great tensions that Nature must hold in balance. These other birds lack the sensitivity and understanding necessary to interpret and evaluate the language of the eagles, and instead require some more obvious guide as to who would be the best suitor, 'How sholde a juge eyther parti leve / For ye or nay withouten any preve?' Because the lower birds are alienated from the traditions of courtly love Nature has to exercise her direct authority in order to hold the parliament together. In doing so she enables a contrast to be drawn between the higher birds-which are capable of accommodating their private feelings to social forms-and the lower, who lack any conventional language for doing so. As a result, the speech of the latter gives utterance to impulsive thought that elevates the needs of the individual above that of the avian society as a whole. The lower birds appear to be a cohesive group simply because they share the same primary need on Valentine's Day: that is 'for to ben delyvered' and satisfy their desire for procreation (St. John 150). The lower birds could also represent the people who have a long way to go in their journey to achieve unity with the Beloved, just as the birds in Attar's *Conference of the Birds* do. Those birds demonstrate the constraints language has on people to achieve spiritual success and the same can be said here of the lower birds in Chaucer's parliament.

Even the other birds of prey themselves have difficulty in choosing between the language of the three eagles, as the falcon who represents them indicates:

*“Ful hard were it to preve by resoun
Who loveth best this gentil formel here;
For everych hath swich replicacioun
That non by skills may be brought adoun.
I can not se that argumentes avayle:
Thanne semeth it there moste be batayle. (534-39)”*

The three eagles accept trial by combat, but this is not what the falcon intends. Instead he appeals to other courtly ideals as a means of deciding between the three:

*“Me wolde thynke how that the worthiest
Of knyghthod, and the lengest had used it,
Most of estat, of blod the gentilleste,
Were sittynge for hire, if that hir leste;
And of these thre she wot hireself, I trowe,
Which that he be, for it is light to knowe. (548-53)”*

Here certain key courtly concepts, the ideals of 'knyghthod', 'estat', and nobility of 'blod', provide a set of objective criteria that can dispel the need for physical conflict. This further demonstrates that the traditional values which pertain to the nobility might provide a medium for facilitating a stable society, one able to accommodate and overcome the potentially destructive desires of the

individual. But they nevertheless are elitist traditions that are meaningless to the 'water-foules' and 'worm-foul', whose views serve only to provide a contrast to the higher sentiment and language of the raptors. The goose for example advises one of the eagles, 'But she wol love hym, lat hym love another!' (567). In order to say this, the goose has imagined the feelings of the eagles as if they were his own, 'I rede hym, though he were my brother' (566). He has failed to see that their language is a genuine reflection of their inner self and that it faithfully represents feelings of superior depth and strength. In other words the goose is treating the feelings of the eagles much more lightly than they deserve to be treated. A sparrow hawk is therefore compelled to respond:

*“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 seyde, 'a fol can not be stille.' (571-74)”*

He is perhaps generous in his condemnation because he takes into account the limitations of the goose's nature, and rather than simply expressing outrage at noble sentiment being taken so lightly, he attributes this to the ignorance-'nycete'- of the goose whose 'wit' cannot comprehend such a thing. The goose's advice to a royal, offered as though he were a brother goose is certainly bold and lacking in adequate respect or sensitivity. The goose goes on to say that it is folly to go on loving where there can be no hope of reward and states 'There been mo sterres, God wot, than a payre!' (595). Outrageous as such a statement may seem to the birds of prey, the goose is at least trying to offer something to the debate that he feels might help the eagles. He

lacks in understanding, tact, imagination and respect, but he is not simply indifferent to their plight as is the cuckoo:

*“I reeche nat how longe that ye stryve,
Lat ech of hem be soleyne al here lyve!
This is my red, syn they may nat acorde;
This shorte lessoun nedeth nat recorde. (606-9)”*

Here the cuckoo shows complete disrespect for both the eagles and the parliament. As such his remarks are the most antisocial sentiments expressed in the parliament, which is in keeping with his nature which the merlin attacks severely:

*“Thow morthere of the heysoge on the branch
That broughte the forth, thow reufullest glotoun!
Lyve thow soleyne, wormes corrupcioun,
For no fors is of lak of thy nature!
Go, lewed be thow while the world may dure! (612-16)”*

Cuckoos were known to be parasites and killers of the host bird's chicks. The cuckoo therefore represents the most antisocial element in the bird parliament and the one that is the most disrespectful of any kind of law. Hence the merlin rebukes him, declaring that he is solitary ('soleyn') because of his lack of concern ('no fors') which indicates the 'lak' in his nature. Here we see clearly that the cuckoo exhibits the antisocial behavior that was theologically explained as a consequence of the fall. Yet this is also an accepted part of the creature nature in Chaucer's poem: it is not presented as being contrary to the goddess Nature's will. This means that we

cannot take the cuckoo (or any of the birds) as simple allegorical representations of people, since antisocial behavior such as the cuckoo's is clearly unacceptable in human society, and cannot be justified as 'lak of thy nature' (St. John 153). This type of behavior is condemned in society and perhaps provides a clear example of how we are not expected to act and what conduct we are supposed to avoid if we hope to attain the object of our devotion. The cuckoo here, in Chaucer's *Parliament*, is somewhat similar to the hoopoe in Attar's *Conference of the Birds*. The hoopoe is often characterized as an unsociable bird; however, in Attar's *Conference of the Birds*, the hoopoe acts as the guide on the birds' spiritual journey.

The courtly love traditions that govern the language of the eagles are, then, represented as an ideal in the poem. If a species is alienated from these traditions by the limitations of their nature, then they are unable to rise above the demands of their own natural needs. This is precisely what the three eagles must do (and what all the subjects of a Christian society ought to do) since the female's decision to defer her choice for another year means that none of them can have their desire satisfied. The ideal of long suffering, a standard feature of courtly love, is consequently upheld as the means by which the eagles defer the gratification of their needs, thus allowing the other impatient species to choose their mates. This convention of courtly love thereby assumes a paramount political significance in the context of the poem by preventing the tensions within the bird society from getting out of control. It enables the parliament to end on a joyful note.

The conclusion is reminiscent of *The House of Fame*. In that work Chaucer greatly expands the compass of the dream vision as he had used it in *The Book of the Duchess*; he

considers problems of poetry and philosophy, as well as love, includes a broad variety of incidents, from Dido's piteous lament to the slapstick comedy of the House of Rumor, and ends with an abruptness that leaves both the narrator and the reader still waiting for the "tydynges" we never learn. The *Parliament* is much the same. Love is considered in its philosophical, social, and poetic, as well as its erotic and progenerative aspects; the poem moves from the solemnity of Scipio's dream to the comic squabbling of the birds; and it abruptly ends before the reader learns who the formel will choose and the dreamer learns the "certeyn thing" he seeks. Yet *The Parliament of Fowls*, unlike *The House of Fame*, is both finished and complete, marked by an elegance of structure and an easy confidence of style notably lacking in that earlier work.

Reason can help to enable the lower classes to deviate in a positive manner, and rise above their nature and station in life:

*"Al were it that myne auncestres were rude,
Yet may the hye God, and so hope I,
Grante me grace to lyven vertuously.
Thanne am I gentil, whan that I bigynne
To lyven vertuously and weyve synne. (1172-76)"*

This raising of the individual above his social circumstances is enabled by virtue which is derived from 'God allone' who gives 'oure verray gentillesse of grace' (1163). A combination of personal agency ('lyven vertuously') and God's power ('gentillesse of grace') guarantees the faithful individual the capacity to rise above their original status and assume a position beyond anything in the world. This teaching demonstrates that Chaucer's consciousness of social

hierarchy could be tempered by a Christian thinking which sees the potential of all allied to Christ to achieve the very highest ideals, higher even than those intimated by courtliness. In achieving this, individuals can fulfill the requirements 'common profit'. *The Parliament of Fowls* upholds courtliness in this sense, as a set of secular traditions that help the individual conform to the highest of ideals. It is therefore left to the reader to determine whether he is a cuckoo or an eagle.

Just as we could apply a Sufi outlook to the *Book of the Duchess*, the same can be done for *The Parliament of Fowls*. Just as Attar uses language in the *Conference of the Birds*, which we will see below, Chaucer uses language in *The Parliament of Fowls* to separate the different classes of society. These different classes of society can be equated with the different degrees of faith and progress along the path to becoming united with the Beloved. The eagles represent the class of people closest to attaining that union since they are able to choose their mate first and use the most eloquent language in their pleas for the formel's hand. The fickleness of the formel is reminiscent of the fickleness of the lover in Hafiz's *Diwan* and represents the same idea: the Beloved is not easily attainable, only the truly pious and worthy are able to become one with God. It is in this way that Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* takes on a religious aspect through its use of language and subject matter; the lower classes of birds are vulgar in their use of language and, therefore have no hope of achieving union with the Beloved at this point in time. The higher classes of birds use language that is more sophisticated and elevated in meaning which is reminiscent of the poetry of some Sufi masters who use lofty language in an attempt to express their feelings and desire for union with the Beloved.

While Chaucer uses birds to convey a message, another text from a different culture also uses birds to transmit a message to society regarding the proper method of conduct in order to obtain their object of devotion or a state of unity with Nature or the Beloved. This text is Farid ud-Din Attar's *The Conference of the Birds*. Instead of Nature presiding over this conference, we have the hoopoe. The hoopoe, a colorful bird about 11 inches long, with slender black beak, wings striped with broad bands of black and white, russet breast and fan-like crest, is found throughout Asia, Africa, and Europe where its regal air and flamboyant plumage has assured it a prominent place in folklore. Hoopoe-lore through time and space reveals an amazingly wide range of roles and attributes. According to Aelian, "It was regarded as a sacred bird in ancient Egypt; even upon the scepters of the gods a Hoopoe is an augmentation of honor." The ancient Arabs ascribed many miraculous medicinal qualities to it while Persian poetic imagery credits the bird with such gentle qualities as filial devotion and virtuousness (Dupree 173). We can already see that by using the hoopoe, Attar is creating a sense of credibility for the audience. They would have known the importance of the hoopoe in their culture, so by having the hoopoe act as the presider of the conference, Attar is giving his message more credible integrity.

Most Pashto speakers use the term *mullah chergak* (*mullah* = Muslim religious leader; *cherg* = cock; *ak* = diminutive), loosely translated as *Bantam Mullah*. Several interpretations for this amusing nomenclature are current in the conservative southern Pushtun city of Kandahar. Though zealously upholding the principles of Islam, the Kandahari often view their religious leaders with less than total reverence and jokingly refer to three behavioral similarities between a hoopoe and a *mullah*. None are particularly complimentary: first, both strut about, constantly mindful of their own importance; second, the hoopoe stays away from the female during the day,

going to her only under cover of darkness, or, his public face fails to match his private face; finally, both *mullah* and hoopoe prefer to stay sheltered near old walls, fearing to venture out into the open and therefore are cowardly. Indeed, the hoopoe does move with a brisk self-assured manner even though known to be a timid bird, preferring to live and nest in crumbling mud walls on the outskirts of villages. That it breeds only at night has not been substantiated. In Herat, among other places, the hoopoe is likened to a *mullah* because its natural habit of bobbing its head up and down as it moves across the fields suggests the movements of the Muslim prayer. Elsewhere, as in the Kunar in Eastern Afghanistan, the hoopoe is said to be called *mullah chergak* because its crest resembles the large, showy turbans sometimes worn by important *mullahs* (Dupree 175). It is here that we can compare it to the cuckoo in Chaucer's *Parliament*; it is an anti-social bird that only ventures out at certain times and plays a role in conveying a message to readers of the *Parliament* and *The Conference of the Birds*.

The hoopoe's role as messenger is extremely important. In several Islamic countries the bird is popularly referred to by such terms as *qaced ul-Sulaiman* in Arabic (Solomon's Messenger); *morgh-e-namebar* in Iranian Persian (Letter-Bearing Bird); *pavag kugu* in Turkish (Courier Bird). Afghan names do not refer to the hoopoe specifically as a messenger but the role figures prominently. On seeing a hoopoe, for instance, Afghans may remark that someone present is bound to receive a happy message. The hoopoe is always portrayed as Solomon's messenger even when, as in this Uzbek story, it lives with Queen Bilquis.

"One day King Solomon sat on his throne and he was very, very unhappy. 'I am king of all the birds, and animals and insects and reptiles of the world. They all live in my domain; pay homage to me. Only one bird amongst all these pays me no heed: the alopopishak does not even choose to live in my kingdom. I wonder what keeps this beautiful bird away?' The more he brooded over

the matter, the more despondent he became until finally he sent for the bird, asking him to come immediately. When the alopopishak arrived, King Solomon put this question to him: 'Why do you not live in my country, along with all the other birds? What keeps you away?' 'Oh! Great Solomon,' he said. 'Who are indeed a great king with a wonderous throne and a rich kingdom but all you have is naught beside the beauty and the virtue of the one I serve.' Irked, King Solomon demanded, 'And who might that be?' 'The most glorious Queen Bilquis, loveliest of all women, most sagacious of all rulers.' So eloquently did the alopopishak describe the queen that the king fell in love with her, sight unseen. Composing a love letter, he entrusted it to the alopopishak who delivered it to the queen to whom he related the virtues of King Solomon. Again, he spoke so well that the queen consented to marriage and they lived in happiness forever."

The fact that the hoopoe represents romantic bliss in Afghanistan is proven even more because of its magical reputation. The hoopoe becomes a sacrifice for love because of its vital role in bringing Solomon and Bilquis together. Using one of the hoopoe's feathers and its blood, sorcerers write powerful talismans; these talismans ensure success in love and guard a loved one from rivals. In a different collection of stories the hoopoe is portrayed as Solomon's conscience rather than just an indication of good-fortune.

"King Solomon was leading his armies through the deserts of Arabia where the heat was so intense that the king thought he would faint. He called for the hudhud to find water for them, but the naughty bird was nowhere to be found. The king sat in the desert getting hotter, and thirstier, and more and more furious. Still the hudhud did not appear. Losing patience, the king sent an eagle to fetch the wayward bird and warn him that unless he returned with a very good excuse, his end was most certainly at hand.

When the eagle returned with the hudhud, King Solomon caught hold of the bird by its neck and was about to dispatch him immediately when the hudhud managed to gasp:

'Oh! Prophet of God! Remember! And be afraid of Judgment Day when you will account to God for all you have done!' Reminded that punishment may not be inflicted without just cause, the king loosened his hold, whereupon the hudhud told this story of his journey to the Kingdom of Saba."

The way in which the hoopoe responds to the irate subpoena adds three new traits to its character: independence, courage and wisdom. By having the audacity to leave Solomon's group and incite the king's wrath, it establishes its independent nature. It shows courage when, being brought to task by Solomon, it reprimands him for unfair treatment. The hoopoe manages to get out of the situation using wise and clever remarks. Here the hoopoe exemplifies probably the most ideal personality type in Afghanistan, the charismatic warrior-poet who fights for just and moral causes with well-turned phrases at the tribal council, as well as with bravery in combat (Dupree183).

The hoopoe is mostly known for its wisdom since it is closely linked with that of Solomon. This is most probably of pre-Islamic origin just as Solomon's knowledge of the speech of birds and animals is based on I Kings (iv: 33). Based on this, King Solomon gathered all the beings of heaven and earth in order to decide which one was the wisest. All the beings chose the hoopoe. It is because of this that Solomon only listens to the hoopoe. Folk-art portraying this shows King Solomon on his throne with the hoopoe perched to one side. The vast multitude faces center, expressions intent, and the hoopoe sits there with its crest open, its gorgeous plumage shining, obviously enjoying the situation (Dupree).

The hoopoe's most often repeated advice is given to Solomon after he marries Queen Bilquis.

"After Solomon married Bilquis, he was so infatuated he would do anything she asked. One day she asked for a new mattress and pillows, specifying that these must be stuffed with the feathers of each and every bird in the world; absolutely no bird was to be left out.

Solomon called for all the birds and stripped them of all their feathers but when Bilquis was presented with the mattress she declared that the feathers of one bird were missing. Ordering a count, it was found that the shauna sarak had not contributed his feathers.

Angry, Solomon sent a camel to fetch the shauna sarak. The camel returned saying the bird refused to come. The king sent a horse, but still he refused. A dog was sent and the shauna sarak returned with it.

'Why would you not come with the camel,' the king demanded.

'Oh! it was so big and I am but a small and timid bird. I was afraid!'

'Why not with the horse?' 'How could I, a mean and humble thing, come with such a handsome animal!'

'But you came with the dog. Why is that?'

'Because I am as lowly and as despised.'

Losing patience with such flippant answers, the king said, angrily: 'Enough of your banter. Why did you not come in the first place? Why inconvenience me by making me send for you?'

'I was busy.'

'Doing what?'

'Counting the number of men and women in the world to see which are more.'

'And what did you find?'

'There are more women than men.'

'Ridiculous! Everyone knows more boys are born each day than girls.'

'Oh! but I have included some men among the women. Those men who follow the commands of women and thereby stray from the path of goodness do not deserve to be counted among men!'

Chagrined, King Solomon returned all the feathers to the naked birds.”

The hoopoe's injunction against deferring to feminine whims is present in much Islamic folklore; in Afghanistan it is the most popular theme associated with the hoopoe and may be heard, in many different forms, in every part of the country. The popularity of the theme may be partly explained by the fact that Afghan society is generally described as ideally patrilineal and patriarchal. Sura IV (entitled *Women*) of the Koran spells out an honorable and dignified place for women in society while still encouraging masculine superiority by maintaining that 'Men are the managers of the affairs of women ..., for that God has preferred in bounty one of them over another,... Righteous women are therefore obedient...'(IV:34). The realities concerning the place of woman in the household, however, depart considerably from the accepted ideal in many cases and these hoopoe tales cautioning against homage to women are an attempt to re-enforce the ideal over the real. The universal popularity of the theme tacitly indicates that the men of Afghanistan are aware of the reality and recognize, either consciously or unconsciously, the influence of their womenfolk. Men tell the tale with obvious enjoyment, gleefully dwelling on the means by which the queen led the great Solomon astray thereby recognizing the human situation in which even the wise and mighty fall victim to feminine wiles. The stories clearly articulate the ideal, but in the telling, the reality appears just as clearly (Dupree 189). This is also

what happens in Chaucer's *Parliament*; the formel is allowed to defer her decision for a year, thereby throwing the parliament into temporary chaos until Nature steps in as a mediator. The eagles had fallen victim to the formel's wiles and were reduced to almost fighting over her.

This enumeration of hoopoe roles and attributes in Afghanistan, therefore, reveals a multifaceted image. A symbol for romance, happiness, wealth and good-fortune, the hoopoe also stands as a champion of justice and defender of such social and moral values as hospitality and righteous behavior. By its actions it defines and perpetuates such idealized character traits as independence, bravery, wit and wisdom. Above all, the hoopoe emerges as an individualist, probably its most uniquely 'Afghan' trait.

Farid ud-Din Attar's *Conference of the Birds* deals with understanding mystical experience and with expressing/illustrating union with the Divine. It also offers a parameter of the phases which one has to pass through in order to gain such a state. The aim is to inspire the reader to embark on their own journey to become one with the Divine. This is shown in the last lines of the poem when the audience is directly addressed: "I have described the Way-- / Now, you must act—there is no more to say" (Attar, 229).

The dilemma is that the poem assumes that correct illustration of mystical experience is impossible; we especially see this at the end of the poem. The experience of becoming one with the Divine is above representation. Furthermore, it is an incident that, at the same time, is difficult to express but also prohibited to express: "I know if I / Betrayed my knowledge I would surely die" (214). As a result, we are confronted with a struggle. On the one hand, depiction of

the Absolute is both impossible and unlawful; on the other hand, the poem seems to suggest that such depiction must still be endeavored (Antikythera).

The poem is a narrative of the various bird species on their quest for the Simorgh. For this task, which symbolizes the journey of the soul towards union with the Divine, the hoopoe guides the birds. We can infer that the hoopoe is our guide as well as birds guide in the poem; this is shown by the narrator's very first statement, who is a person and not a bird, "Dear hoopoe, welcome! You will be our guide" (29).

The hoopoe is represented as a vessel of communication, "It was on you King Solomon relied / To carry secret messages between / His court and distant Sheba's lovely queen" (29).

Furthermore, he is the most outspoken character in the poem; it is usually difficult to distinguish between the voices of the poet, narrator and hoopoe. The hoopoe is a kind of embodiment of language or, at least, an embodiment of a certain *kind* of language. He is the personification of the sort of linguistic communication that has the power to lead us on the "way" to divine being he is the one who incites the birds, who provides inspiration for them using language as an encouragement.

However, the hoopoe recognizes that he has limits just like everyone else. His words, according to him, are ultimately "unequal" (79). We have no way of knowing if the hoopoe is among the thirty birds who survive the journey, since he disappears long before the end of the poem even though we assume he has (Antikythera). It is obvious here that language by itself does not help us reach the absolute. In actuality, the poem sees that language as a hindrance rather than assistance in the quest for the Divine. The birds' quest for the *Simorgh* is constantly

held up because of their complaints and objections. In this case, words are not helping to solve problems but rather cause them.

Furthermore, sections of the poem indicate that the self is intertwined with language. It is repeatedly stressed that the self should be abandoned during the quest for union with the Divine. In order to connect with God, one must transcend the self. In this respect, it is noteworthy that when the birds complete their quest and reach the *Simorgh* they are at a loss for words; they contemplate inwardly and the *Simorgh* answers them silently. The narrator tells us that having a use for language is, in fact, indicative of distance from the Divine: "Those who can speak still wander far away / From that dark truth they struggle to convey" (221).

This reservation about language is seen throughout the poem not only as a theme but as a symbol as well. In other words, the poem moves forward by creating signs that are seemingly fixed. The constant association between symbol and meaning is constantly examined and the collapse of the links between symbol and meaning narrows the gaps in language. At the beginning of *The Conference of the Birds*, for example, we find among other things the following apostrophe to a parrot:

"... welcome, parrot, perched in paradise!
Your splendid plumage bears a strange device,
A necklace of bright fire about the throat,
Though heaven's bliss is promised by your coat,
This circle stands for hell ...
(29)"

The poem raises two interesting details. One of the details is that an actual parrot is created in our minds and has distinct feathers with a fiery ring around its neck. The other interesting detail is that the parrot is not real, even though it is made to seem so. It is a compilation of symbols; its colors have meaning (Antikythera). The poem at once describes both the bird's feathers and the situation of the soul, which may attain heaven or just as easily be damned to hell.

Similar repetition of referents ensues over and over during the course of the poem. The majority of the first half of the poem deals with the hoopoe managing the protestations of the birds. This part of the poem is mainly a compilation of stories related to the birds and the reader by either the hoopoe or the narrator normally because of a comment made by one of the other birds. The story tends to stand by itself though without having an obvious connection to the comment that brought it about and never has any relation to the birds. Rather, the stories deal with the troubles of everyday men. As an illustration, we can take the first story which results after the nightingale protests about the journey. The nightingale is infatuated with a rose and therefore doesn't want to leave it in order to go on an extended journey to seek the *Simorgh*. In reply to this, the hoopoe tells the nightingale that his infatuation is superficial and not true love. As a result, the nightingale is being laughed at for his silliness. A story about a dervish then follows. The dervish has fallen in love with a princess just because she smiled at him. The dervish is consumed with distress for love's sake only to realize that he has been deceived, the object of his love does not favor him; her smile was from pity and mocking, after informing the dervish of this fact, she disappears.

We are supposed to be able to see the similarities between the two stories. It is obvious that the story about the dervish has direct parallels to the story about the nightingale. Both of them are ridiculed by the object of their affection. They are consumed by appearances and fail to see what fools they are making of themselves for not paying attention to what is on the inside. Before we see the connection between the two stories though, we are faced with a moment of doubt as to why the story of the dervish is even relevant; we are faced with a situation in which the signs of language are cut loose from meaning.

In this situation, it is vital to notice that the journey of the birds, and therefore, the soul, towards the Divine is taking place through words and that this journey emphasizes and conceals a discontinuity. It is clear the journey of the birds is created and acts as a linguistic device. However, the actual journey in which the "world of birds" is culled down to "thirty exhausted wretched, broken things" (214) is given extremely little symbolic consideration. Less than twenty lines are dedicated to the entire journey. We are briefly told that the birds journeyed for several years and that several perished along the way from drowning, starvation and predators. We are never given any details though; we seem to be viewing the journey from a great distance. We also see the birds as an entire group rather than individual beings; not even the hoopoe is seen after this.

The complete explanation of what happens to the birds over the progression of their journey, in fact, appears only as a "written page" (217), which, in the end, turns out to be what ultimately synthesizes their union with the *Simorgh*. Having at last arrived before the throne of

the *Simorgh*, the birds are given a document that both relates and clarifies the meaning of their journey:

*“The thirty birds read through the fateful page
And there discovered, stage by detailed stage,
Their lives, their actions, set out one by one—
... they shrank with shame.
Then, as by shame their spirits were refined
...
The past and all its actions were no more.
...
they see the Simorgh—at themselves they stare,
And see a second Simorgh standing there;
They look at both and see the two are one
(218-9)”*

The written page represents the poem itself. The ultimate aim of the birds is to leave language and representation behind. The last part of their journey however, occurs in a symbol of language, which is the written page in the poem we are reading. In this way the poem comes full circle; by using symbolism, we are lead to a symbol of the un-representable. By using self-referentiality, we are able to transcend the self. The moment of dislocation and discontinuity, of "Bewilderment," in which we experience "pain and gnawing discontent" and stray from "unity" with "indecisive steps" (196) is precisely the moment in which we lose ourselves and reach "Oblivion, the Nothingness of love" (207).

The Conference of the Birds deals with the birds of the world making the decision to go on a quest in search of their king the *Simurgh*. It also deals with their fundamental doubts and fears, and the wise advice of their leader Hoopoe who helps them overcome their fears. All of the birds waver from their position at one point or another causing their leader to encourage them with examples of other such difficult situations. To back his point up, the Hoopoe also uses

references to the early Muslim mystics such as Rabi'a al-'Adawiyya, Abu Sa'id ibn Abi'l-Khayr, Mansur al-Hallaj and Shibli. The different types of birds represent the various personality types of humans along with all the various characteristics that make up a person.

In *The Conference of the Birds* Attar is communicating the means of attaining inner perfection. The journey of the birds to the Simorgh represents those means. The journey is made up of various stages which are symbolized by seven valleys. The reason Attar used valleys to represent the different stages is because it is not an easy, straightforward journey; rather it consists of hardships and difficulties. These valleys can serve as obstacles to the traveller in that they will either enchant him or entrap him. The seven valleys that Attar uses may be interpreted, in order, as follows:

The valley of Longing and Searching is the stage that deals with creatures searching for something that is missing even though without realizing, it is their absence from their original home that is causing a feeling of loss. It is this sense of longing to feel complete that drives us from one achievement or desire to the next, without us really knowing what it is that will satisfy our hunger once and for all (Abdi).

Following this valley is the valley of love which represents the type of love that consumes the lover completely. The lover is cleansed and renewed while at the same time undergoes a radical spiritual change so that he is raised to a higher state. This is true loving surrender, regardless of religious tradition, reputation, name or fame, like the love of Majnun for Layla. The valley of intuitive Knowledge is also known as the wisdom of the heart, *marifat* or gnosis, this is direct revelation of the truth as opposed to '*ilm*' or expansive knowledge (Abdi).

This revelation leads to forgetting about material, everyday objects (valley of Detachment) and becoming aware that all existence has unity (valley of Unity); this includes both phenomenal and causative worlds. Everything becomes one as all materialistic and earthly objects are renounced and as a result all opposites dissolve. All objects and beings join into one single Essence. According to Jami, ‘Unification consists in unifying the heart, that is, purifying it and stripping it of all attachment to all things other than “The Truth”, including not only desire and will but also knowledge and intelligence’. These valleys or states lead to the valley of Bewilderment, which is the deep darkness of the soul referenced by many Christian Gnostics, deals with constant sadness along with consuming desire and the pain of being in love without knowing who.

Finally, in the valley of Poverty and Annihilation, the thirty birds who undertook the painful journey in the search of the *Simurgh* realize that they themselves, *si murgh* (=thirty birds in Persian) are the *Simurgh*. The story thus ends with one of the most inventive puns in Persian mystical poetry. This is the ultimate sought after state of *fana*’, the nullification of the mystic in the Divine presence when the seeker finds his way into the ocean of his own soul, all longing ends. However, this is not the end. When the soul has finished its journey to God, the journey in God begins; the state that the Sufis call *baqa*’ i.e. the absorption and abiding life in God. Here the soul navigates ever new depths of the incomprehensible, Divine being, which no tongue can describe. Referring to this state Ghazali says ‘When I saw the rays of that sun, I was swept out of existence. Water flowed back to water’. The water drop finally falls back into the ocean, and the mortal form of the moth is reduced to smoke and ash in his Beloved flame’s embrace. It is the *Nirvana* of the soul-bird which has finally returned Home (Abdi).

It can be seen from the first part of this chapter that, the *Parliament of Fowls* offers a special lesson for later royal audiences. On the one hand it presents the resource of courtliness in matters of love as being the natural possession of the nobility. In this sense the poem affirms the elitism of the traditions of courtly love. But it also holds up to the nobility an example of what sexual desire, unstructured by traditional protocols, makes the individual look like: a duck, or worse, a cuckoo. The representation of different attitudes to love in the form of different species, some noble and some ignoble, allows those at either end of the social spectrum to locate themselves somewhere on the scale, not by virtue of birth, but by virtue of conduct.

The poem therefore mentions the highest ideals of *fin amors* in a positive light through the figures of the eagles. But, just as in the *Book of the Duchess*, the poem describes the potentially destructive outcome of a complete subjection to courtly love traditions through descriptions of the temple of Venus. Chaucer's use of the impressionable narrator again has this time enable him to revise the conventions of courtly love in a political paradigm. The purpose of this is again to affirm the paramount importance of reason, this time directing the individual to act in accordance with the principle of "commune profit"; and Chaucer presents the courtly language and the conduct of the higher birds as protocols that are conducive to this aim. The avian parliament is presented to the reader as both a delightful innovation upon the traditions of *fin amors*, whilst also offering a political ideal of a more enfranchised courtly discourse; one that is socially beneficial, enabling the likes of geese and even cuckoos to comment upon the affairs of eagles. This ambitious attempt to integrate the concerns of royalty (eagles) with that of commoners (waterfowl) means that Chaucer is using courtly literary conventions in a very demanding way: requiring that his audience recognize which aspects of them are beneficial and

which are not, as he extends the range of these conventions beyond the exclusive confines of the social elite.

We can see that Attar's *Conference of the Birds* has similarities to the *Parliament* in that both works deal with behavioral issues. They both show readers how one is supposed to act in order to achieve certain goals whether they are political or spiritual. Lower classes of society are included in order to show the contrast between the different stages of a journey; the lower classes are being shown how far they still have to come and the higher classes are being shown how far they have come.

Conclusion

After having compared two of Chaucer's dream visions to works of Eastern literature, I have come to a few conclusions. It is safe to say that Chaucer and his Eastern contemporaries knew nothing whatsoever about each other and the fact that their work had common themes such as, loss of loved ones and their consequent grief along with religious undertones which provided the narrators and readers with guidance in regaining faith is interesting. The fact that they had similar themes and symbols indicates that both Chaucer and his Eastern contemporaries were probably familiar with the same sources. I say this because it was common for literary and scholarly works to travel to different continents by means of translation and word of mouth.

Having said this, it is important to note that Chaucer was unaware of Sufi literature and was not a mystic himself but could very well have been familiar with Western mystics and their writings. His awareness would have influenced his writing with respect to themes and the symbol of the woman which unknowingly echo the subject matter of Eastern Sufi literature. Because of Chaucer's use of Sufi terminology and symbolism, in my opinion, this makes it even more plausible to look at Chaucer's dream visions with a mystical perspective. We should also pay attention to the fact that a vision and a dream are two completely different things in the eyes of mysticism and religion. In religion and mysticism, a vision is something that occurs while the person is awake and coherent; it has more clarity than a dream, but less psychological connotations. Religious and mystical visions are often considered miracles and involve experiencing the energies of God. Dreams, on the other hand, are more open to interpretation since they are usually successions of images, emotions and ideas. Dreams normally reflect our

subconscious and serve as a means to work through problems or to even alert us to any problem we might be facing internally without fully realizing.

Having said this, we now understand why Chaucer chose the dream to frame his narratives; we are given several fantastic images that serve as signals to alert us to the fact that we are not dealing with the plausible but, are in fact dealing with problems presented by the narrators subconscious's as dreams. Having the narrators work their problems out during their dreams allows us to see how issues of love and court should be handled. We see the difference in the visions of the Eastern works of literature; the visions serve as means to impart miracles that have occurred and to provide moral lessons on how to conduct oneself in order to achieve a higher goal.

It is interesting to note that Chaucer has given his works the title of 'dream vision' and not merely 'dream'. It is because I feel and have shown that Chaucer's writing had a more serious intent behind it than just mere criticism of social wrongs; it had the intent of providing moral and religious lessons that happen to be also characteristic of Sufi/mystical themes and terminology.

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